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WINDER A WINDER

The Official Strategy Guide

Access Software, Inc.
Under a Killing Moon

Rick Barba

Prima Publishing
P.O. Box 1260BK
Rocklin, CA 95677-1260



Under a Killing Moon: The Official Strategy Guide



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Acknowledgements

This book was a joy to write for several reasons.

First, Under a Killing Moon is a hugely entertaining game. I can't think of the last time I laughed out loud during second, third, or fourth viewings of a scene in a computer game. In fact, many scenes got better with subsequent viewings.

Second, the people at Access were so genuinely warm and helpful that the usually painful process of soliciting aid from the software developer was shockingly enjoyable. In particular, I want to thank Steve Witzel, Susan Dunn, and Jim Slade for their friendly and always prompt assistance; and of course, thanks to Chris Jones and Aaron Conners for their amiable accessibility.

Finally, I want to express my usual gratitude to the great Prima editorial team that—despite our scary deadlines—still made the frenzied process of producing this book a truly pleasant and professional experience. Thanks to Ben Dominitz and Roger Stewart for initiating and believing in the project; and to Debbie Parisi, Hartley Lesser, Dan Foster, and Diane Pasquetti for their help and attention.

Most of all, I extend a very special thanks to Pattie Lesser, my project editor, for her guidance, patience, and encouragement every step of the way.

I wish all writers with impossible deadlines could have a Pattie Lesser on their side.

Rick Barba

Introduction to

Killing Moone







Introduction

Few products in the history of entertainment software have gotten the kind of advance publicity as has *Under a Killing Moon*. The industry buzz was almost deafening in the year before its release — in magazines, trade shows, bulletin boards, on the street, wherever. Previewers who'd gotten a glimpse of the work-in-progress were dazzled. A ten-month delay in the product release only added to the frenzy of anticipation.

The PR angles were indeed juicy. First, there was the obvious "Hollywood meets Silicon Valley" spin. The game features name actors — James Earl Jones, Margot Kidder, Brian Keith, Russell Means. And what's more, they actually *act*. Hollywood, of course, has been almost insanely obsessed with The Coming of Interactive Multimedia lately. But nobody in Hollywood quite understood what that meant ... until demo versions of *Under a Killing Moon* finally hit the superhighway.

Then there was the technology angle. *Under a Killing Moon* features a stunning leap forward in 3-Dimension game engine design, depicting the first "virtual world" that actually *feels* like one. (The Hollywood pitch would be "*Doom* meets *Myst* with a whacked-out sense of humor.") Sprawled across four CDs, *Moon*'s world is beautiful, kinetic, alive, fully interactive ... and massive.

When the game was released in the fall of 1994, it finally stood on its own two legs. And as all the PR heat began to dissipate, the real story of *Under a Killing Moon* became apparent. That story begins and ends



with scruffy, lovable Tex Murphy, P.I., the star of the game. Tex is easily the most compelling, well-developed character in the history of interactive entertainment. Part Bogart as Sam Spade, part Leslie Nielsen as Lt. Frank Drebin (of the *Naked Gun* films), Tex is probably the first computer game character you've ever cared about.

Overall, *Under a Killing Moon* reflects the devotion of its creators to the cinema of another era — films such as *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep, Casablanca* and others. *Under a Killing Moon*'s witty, literate script and its cinematic realization pay homage to those classics.

How to Use This Book

As I said, the virtual world of *Under a Killing Moon* is alive and huge. It's the kind of world that screams for a strategy guide, despite the game's on-line hint feature. This guide is divided into three easy-to-use parts:

Part One is a novelized version of *Under a Killing Moon*. This is a good section to consult when you want "soft hints" rather than "hard answers." Here, Tex Murphy tells his story, nudging you gently along the most expeditious route to the game's end. The narrative is divided into chapters and sections so that you can find the hints you want easily.

Part Two is a no-frills, step-by-step walkthrough of the game. It's a private investigator's dream — straight answers, no tapdancing. It will take you from location to location on a direct route to the final solution. For fun, I've also included earned points and all the "bonus steps" that don't really affect the outcome, but are amusing to try anyway.

Part Three The interviews might be worth the price of admission alone, if you're a Tex Murphy fan. You'll enjoy these in-depth conversations with *Moon* co-creators Chris Jones and Aaron Conners — after all, Chris Jones *is* Tex Murphy. You'll learn where Tex came from, where he's going, and what it's like to be his alter ego. You'll also get a peek at the making of *Under a Killing Moon* as Jones and Conners discuss the project's development process from concept to script to live shooting/recording sessions with real Hollywood talent.

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Killing



Under a Killing Moon

A Novella

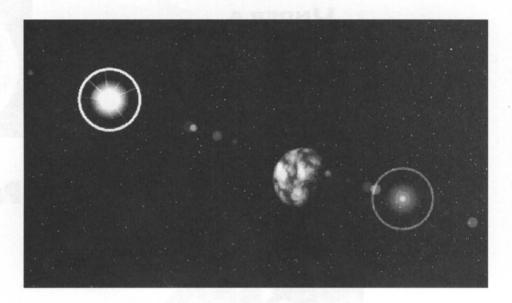
Rick Barba



Part 1







Prologue

"So, they've found it again, have they? I thought we'd taken care of it."

"The forces of evil are persistent, sir."

"I'm getting too old for this. Who have we got lined up to deal with this problem?"

"Murphy, sir."

"Oh no! Not Murphy!"

"Afraid so, sir."

"What about Spade or Marlowe?"

"Uh . . . dead, sir."

"Isn't there anyone else?"

"Sorry, sir, he's next on the list."

"Well...I suppose we'll have to make do. Knowing Murphy, he's going to need help. A lot of help."

"I'll check the archives and get back to you, sir."





The Beginning: San Francisco,

2042 A.D.

No pestilence has ever been so fatal, or so hideous...
Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and horror of blood...

-Edgar Allan Poe

In the moonlight, New San Francisco sparkles like a chunk of cubic zirconium — an island of hollow beauty surrounded by a red sea of radiation. Five million souls, drowning in gamma rays.

Some lucky people have a natural immunity to genetic mutation caused by the radiation. I'm one of them. Most of them live in the New



City, but I don't. I live among the unlucky souls, the mutants and the destitute, in the wreckage of Old San Francisco.







 $M_{
m y}$ name's Tex Murphy. I'm a private detective.

At least I used to be. Since my marriage hit the rocks I haven't done much of anything.

I went out tonight for the first time in a week. But all I ended up doing was spend-

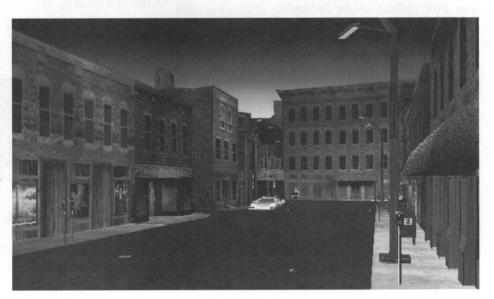
ing the last of my money on a bottle of cheap bourbon. Now it's past midnight and I'm staring out the window of my office on the second floor of the Ritz Hotel. Just like me, the Ritz used to *be* something. Now it's just another grimy building in a rundown part of town.



And I'm almost out of bourbon.

There's No Place Like Home

Note the festive
bits of garbage
strewn gaily
along Chandler
Avenue, world
headquarters of
the famous Tex
Murphy P.I.
Agency and
Dance Studio.



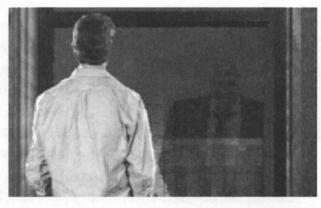




As I stood there, looking out over the littered wreckage of Chandler Avenue below me, I heard my office door creak open. And then I saw it, in the window — a ghostly apparition, like some sour reflection of the past.

It was the Colonel himself.

"My god,
Murphy," he rumbled. "You look like hell." He clucked his tongue like a schoolmarm. "Really hit bottom, haven't you?"
The old man could barely conceal his glee.



Mileage Plus
Hey, there's
something on
the window.
It looks like
a human
road mab.

I staggered over to my desk and sat down. "Oh, I don't usually look this bad. I forgot to take my Geritol this morning." I tried to focus, or at least blink the glaze out of my eyes. "So, you want a drink? I saved my

first one to have with you."

"No thanks," he said with a glimmer of regret. "I've been dry for eight years now. Yeah, one morning I just looked in the mirror and decided I needed to make a few lifestyle changes. Quit smoking, quit drink-



Welcome to My Personal Hell

That's me, Tex Murphy. And that's my best friend, Jack, sitting on the desk there.

ing." He clapped his hands together, rubbing them with obvious relish. "Now I'm getting out of the business. Yep, gonna move to the





tropics and retire on a nice, secluded island with a tribe of beautiful young women."

His face cracked into a leer that qualified as a Class 4 felony in my book.

I was legitimately shocked.

The Colonel My old mentor. If you looked up "crusty P.I." in your CD-ROM encyclopedia, you'd get a multimedia profile of this guy.



"You're getting *out* of the business? I guess that means the end of the world's just around the corner because you are *the* detective. I can't even imagine you doing anything else — especially not running around an island with a bunch of nubile women in a loincloth."

"Aaah, I can imagine it." He clasped his hands behind his back, looking old, tight, hunched up. He shuffled to the window, grunting. "I've been thinking about it for *years* now. You know how it is: Lonely. Underappreciated. Dangerous." He was growling now. "I haven't had a decent night's sleep in 38 years. I tell ya, I'm working a case right now and it's gonna be my last one."

Say It Ain't So The Colonel says he's retiring from the biz. Suddenly, I feel old.







He looked down at the floor — a rare moment of introspection. But then he brightened. "Enough about me. What about you, Tex? How's life treating you? Bad as it looks?" He chortled, obviously enjoying the travesty of my existence.

I played it nonchalant. "Depends. What day is it today, anyway? Saturday? Saturdays aren't too bad." I poured myself another shot of Black Jack. "It's normally Thursday by the time I get really suicidal." I knocked back the shot, savoring the burn. "So, what is it you wanted? Or did you just come by to sprinkle a little salt into the open wounds of my pathetic life?"

"Naw, Tex. You got me all wrong. Just because you turned me in, got me suspended, humiliated me in front of my peers. . . ." He suddenly hissed, "You sold me out!" Then, just as suddenly, he grinned. Like some schizoid street rat. "But that's all in the past. See, I quit hating you for that weeks ago. Like I said, I'll be leaving soon, and I didn't want to go with any loose ends dangling there to bother me in my golden years."

I unleashed a drunken snort. "Hey, don't worry about *me*. When you tossed me out of the agency, it was the best thing that ever happened. Digging through dumpsters, sleeping in abandoned speeders. You helped me learn a great lesson: No matter how bad things are, they can always get worse."

But the Colonel wasn't looking for a fight. In fact, he actually seemed concerned about my well-being. "So what happened to you? I heard you were doing pretty well there for awhile. Did a hell of a job on that Martian Memorandum case." He fixed me with his trademark interrogative stare. "What's your problem? You one of those people can't live with success? *Eh*?"

I clasped my hands behind my throbbing head.

"Oh, I can live with it," I said. "I'm just afraid of commitment."

Suddenly a wave of the past washed over me. Hell, maybe it was time to do a little raving myself. "Now you tell *me* something," I growled. "Why wouldn't you talk to me fifteen years ago? I was a stupid kid back





then! You could have tried to understand why I told the Ethics Board what I did. I mean, I understand now that I was out of line, and I made a mistake. Why'd you cut me off like that?"

The Colonel's festering anger erupted to the surface again. "Because apparently you never learned the first rule of a P.I. — never, *ever* betray your friends! Now, friendship goes beyond blood or race or politics." He was yelling now. "You've got to find out who your friends are, then you hold on to 'em!"

He regained some composure, and added: "They're a precious commodity to people like me and you. Now listen, before I go, I came here with a warning. I heard your name mentioned in connection with the case that I'm working on. And you stay out of it! If you don't, somebody's gonna find you floating in the bay with a hole in your head, and I don't need any more strain on my conscience."

"You know, frankly, I'm pretty insulted," I said, hauling myself to my feet. I dug a pack of Luckies out of my shirt pocket, popped one up. "Cause I'm a pretty damn good detective and I can take care of myself, thank you." I clamped numb lips on the cigarette, pulled it from the pack, and sat back down.

Next thing I know, I'm staring up from the floor at the Colonel's cratered mug.

He glared down at me. "Just remember what I said, Tex. You got



no idea what kind of people we're dealing with here. Keep out of my way."

His last words danced in a boozy swirl through my head: "I'll send you a postcard."





Part 1
Days 1 thru 7











Case Log Transcript: 12-11-42

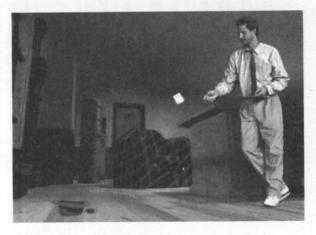
Office

11:00 AM

It seems a little pathetic to be making entries in my case log dictaphone when I haven't had a case in nearly a year. But old habits die hard — unlike *careers*, I guess, which seem to pass away all too easily.

So last night after 15 years the Colonel walks into my office. Made me take a good hard look at myself. Maybe I *have* hit bottom and maybe I *do* look like hell. Lord knows the only exercise I've had lately is tipping the bottle and flipping cards into my hat.

What a Guy
Trivia question:
How many cards
did I get in my
hat? (If you know
the answer,
you're more
desperate than
I am.)



I've gotta find some work.

Contrary to what the Colonel might think, I'm as good a detective as *he* ever was. Now I've just got to prove it. I'm gonna scare up some work today. Even if it means finding somebody's lost puppy.

Where to look, though?

One thing the Colonel taught me: A good place to start any search is the U. S. Mail. Amazing what people will entrust to the care of deranged homicidal postal workers. I glance at the office door — two envelopes lay on the floor. Looking on the bright side, I figure that's two good chances to be awarded a lottery prize.

Then again, I hear my ex-wife's been looking for me.





I grab the faceup envelope first,
pleased to note it's
addressed to the
previous occupant
— as I see it, this
immediately
increases the odds
that it might actually
contain something
of value. But no, it's
only a sales flyer for
the new Electronics



Mail Call for Tex What did Mr. Postman bring today?

Shop next door. I try to imagine buying electronics. You need *money* for that, don't you?

Even more amusing is the credit card application that's enclosed.

But then I looked closer. It's pre-approved.

Hey, all I need is a pen and a stamp, and I'm in business. Fortunately, my desk supplies consist of exactly one pen and one stamp. Soon I've got a ready-to-mail application for the Auto-Postbox out on the street.

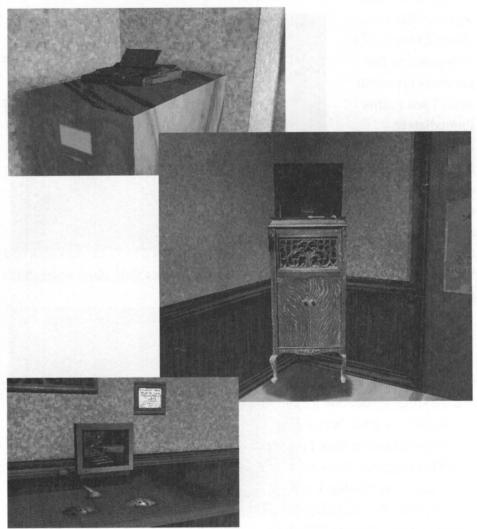
Maybe it *is* time for an electronics purchase or two. I glance at my fax machine. Only nostalgia keeps me from beating it savagely. My Crime Link computer is still shipshape, though. It's the only valuable piece of equipment left in the office. By entering information like height, weight, and hair color, I can access a suspect's personal files.



In My
Drawers
Hey, is that a
\$10 stamp?







Murphy's Law of Hardware

The fax machine's deceased, the phone's disconnected, the phonograph's a family heirloom.

At least the computer works.

Since I'm on a roll with the mail, I rip open the other envelope. It's a gift certificate, entitling me to "ONE FREE COSMETIC JOB (Nose, Boob, etc.), courtesy of THE REAL YOU Surgical Clinic." Maybe now I can take care of that unsightly groin problem that's kept me out of all the finer health clubs in town.

Well, whenever everything's gone to hell, I still have my gun. Look at it, glistening like wet heat on the credenza. Man, I love my gun.







I Love It Soooo Much! Nothing like a good handgun to bring out the testosterone

rage in a man.

Office 11:35 AM

Today's safety tip: When playing with guns, *always* aim for appendages. Wounds to the extremeties tend to heal within weeks!



Office

11:45 AM

I'm battling the urge to drink breakfast. I made the mistake of glancing at Sylvia's photo on the desk... something I try not to do when I'm sober. Yeah, the memories came flooding back into the Mississippi lowlands of my life.





That's Her, Officer The photo there, on the desk. She ran over my dignity, hit-and-run.



Ah, Sylvia. My ex-wife. Whenever I think things can't get any worse, I think about her and how she totally screwed up my life. She's a woman who loves a man — any man, any time. I'll never forget the day I came home early and caught her with the upholstery guy. Why, it's so vivid, I can see it now...

My latest investigation had ended unexpectedly when the grocer I was tailing had a cerebral hemorrhage while playing Where's The Saddle Horn? with two hookers in chaps. His wife was most pleased, and I got home early for once.

As I opened the door, I saw Sylvia slithering across the room in a red leather miniskirt toward a big puffy guy with a staple gun. She slid up behind him, and he spun around in surprise.

"Oh there you are!" he said. "I just got done with the chair. Uh, I'll be sending the bill to your husband."

"Oh... Rudy," cooed Sylvia. "Let's not think about my husband right now." She slid her hands up onto his shoulders. "I was watching you upholster, and you're so big and strong!"

"You really think so?"





"Yes! God, I've only known you for ten minutes, and already I feel

like I've known you forever." Her hands worked the poor sap like he was a lump of clay on a potter's wheel. "Oh yes, look . . . and look at this muscle!" She squeezed a fat bicep. "Oh, the way you hold me! Tex never held me like this! Kiss me Rudy . . . and set my lips on fire!" Rudy said, "Okay."

That was enough. I slunk into the room to rescue Rudy, if not my marriage.



Work
Her job,
apparently, is to
tear every shred
of self-respect
from my
psychological
being.

Sylvia spun around. "Oh Tex, honey! I wasn't expecting you home so soon."

Now there's a real news flash. "Well, *duh*," I said, slapping my forehead. "Now I know why the Roto-Rooter man keeps calling and asking if we need our plumbing checked." I caught sight of Rudy's work. "Though I've got to admit, those chairs look pretty good."

"Uh, thanks," said Rudy. "Listen, how about I don't charge you on

the labor and we call it even?"

"Fair enough," I said. "But from here on out, Rudy, customer servicing doesn't include my wife."

Rudy nodded. He was a good guy, for an idiot.

"See honey, I saved you some money again!" said Sylvia. "Aren't you happy?"

OK, I married her for better or for worse. Unfortunately, it never got any better.



Roto-Rudy
OK, the chair
looks great.
But I'd rather
have my pride,
thanks.





Street, Chandler Ave. 12:00 PM

After the wrenching flashback, I needed some fresh air but I went outside anyway. I thought I'd nose around a bit. Pick up gossip on scandal and mayhem, that sort of thing.

Plus I had that credit card application to mail. There's an Auto-Postbox just across the street. Surprisingly, there's no graffiti on it. Maybe people around here are starting to respect our government and its fine agencies.

Street Items
The Auto-Postbox
is handy, and that
discarded
newspaper on the
corner is free
reading



Of course, the Postal Service has gotten much faster since the stamp price went to ten dollars. I should get my credit card back tomorrow morning.

Up on the corner I saw a discarded section of the *Bay City Mirror*, a local

newsletter — "written by mutants, for mutants." I decided to check the latest Mutant League scores. If you've never been to a Mutant League game, you're missing a *real* sporting event. You never know what's going to end up on the ground.





Anyway, I examined the Mirror. There was an interesting article:

BURGLARIES BAFFLE POLICE

The total of inner-city pawnshop burglaries committed over the past three weeks now stands at nine.

Zlppy Cash, located at the corner of Jackson and Maple Streets, was broken into three nights ago.

Pawnshop owner Urban Robey did not report the crime until this morning, thinking it was simply a practical joke played by his friends.

Tragically, this was not the case.

Of the nine burglarized pawnshops, Zippy Cash was only the second not owned by a mutant. There has been some speculation that police are not actively investigating the crimes, since most of the victims are mutants. Mayor Lender, who is up for reelection later this year and will need the mutant vote to retain his position, has publicly called the police onto the carpet.

Police Lt. Mac Malden, who is heading the investigation, denies that the police are dragging their feet: "What we're dealing with here is some kind of master criminal-he just hasn't left us much of anything to work with." Lt. Malden is sure that the burglaries have all been committed by the same person:
"The M.O.s [methods of operation] have been almost identical. A girl goes to a pawnshop, hocks a piece of jewelry for a large amount of cash, then the shop is broken into that same night."

Lt. Malden would not specify, but said that his team of detectives had some evidence and hoped to have some solid leads within the next few days.

"Baffled police," eh? Man, those words are music to a P.I.'s ears.

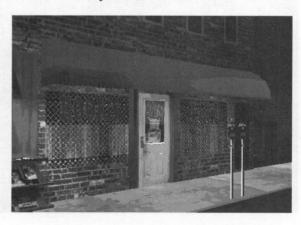
Hmmm. Nine pawn shops in three weeks. Maybe I ought to chat with Rook Garner, our local pawnbroker. He might know something about these burglaries.

Rook's Pawnshop 12:30 PM

I did my slouchy detective walk across the street to Rook's place. You know the kind I mean — hands deep in the trenchcoat pockets, etc. I used to work on it in my spare time. Now it just comes natural.

Rook's a crusty old World War III vet with a face like a raisin and a tongue like a butcher's cleaver. He spun around, glared at me for a second, then said, "What do you want, Murphy?"

I usually try to give



Night Takes Rook

This pawnshop, run by Rook
Garner, was recently burglarized. My job? Well, I don't have one . . . not yet.





mutants the benefit of the doubt . . . and anyway, I know Rook is all bark, no bite. So I stayed oblivious to the hostility. I figure it's inbred. "Fine!" I replied cheerily to his non-inquiry about my well-being. "And how are *you* doing, Rook?"

"I'm not in the mood for small talk," he rasped.

I'll be the first to admit that sarcasm can be a fatal affliction in certain situations — marriage, for example. Fortunately, I am able to infuse mine with serious purpose. I said, "Well then, by all means, let's discuss a *serious* topic."

"Are breaking, entering, and robbery serious enough for you, Murphy?" he replied. "Last night, someone broke into my pawn shop. I don't usually have anything of great value. But yesterday, I gave out a fair amount of cash for an extremely valuable diamond bracelet."

Aha. Pawnshop burglary #10. My investigative fires rekindled, I asked, "How much is a *fair* amount of cash?"



Rook Garner
Sure, he's cute.
Too bad he's got
the personality of a
carmelized onion.



"In this case, eight thousand dollars," he said.

This surprised me. I said, "Boy, that's a lot of clams, Rook."

"Don't you think I know that?" he spluttered. "The bracelet was pawned by a young girl named Ema Nymton. She said she hated to hawk a family heirloom, but had no choice! She said she would reclaim the bracelet in a month. Well, since the bracelet was worth ten *times* the eight thousand I loaned her, it was a good deal for me."

I made one of my trademark keen observations. "I think you've been played for a sap, Rook."

"Maybe," he replied. "She left me a number and I called it this morning. But the line is disconnected."

Well, it was time to make my pitch. I needed work, and I wasn't above grovelling for it. "Sounds like my vast experience as a P.I. could come in handy."

"Aaa, it couldn't hurt," he said, waving off my "vast experience" with a hand gesture. "The *police* are no help. A mutant is on his own when he gets robbed in this town. I'd appreciate your help. I'm not a rich man, but if you find the bracelet, I'll owe you a few favors . . . which *could* come in handy." He opened the partition. "Come back here, and I'll show you where they broke in."

Alley (Behind Rook's Pawnshop) 12:45 PM

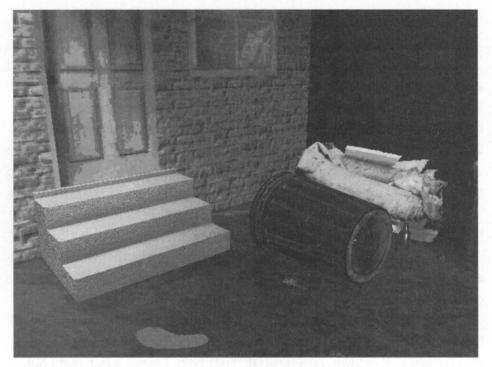
Rook took me out back and showed me where the burglar broke in. The back window was busted out and the latch was ripped. It's a sloppy job.

As I started my investigation, I was looking for information to enter into my Crime Link computer back at the office. One thing's for sure: "Ema Nymton" won't be one of the suspect's names. Every P.I. worth his salt knows that's "Not My Name" spelled backwards.





Scene of the Crime OK, gumshoe. Get to work.



Alley 1:45 PM

Well, it was a standard procedural scan. I sifted through the alley debris. Most of the good stuff was near the busted-out window. Under a tipped-over trash can I found a key. Next to that, I found a shoeprint outlined in a sticky pool of something resembling chocolate. I noted that it was about a size 14, then moved under the window.

Ducks In a
Row
Your clues are
lined up neatly
for you —
footprint, key,
and glass
shard.





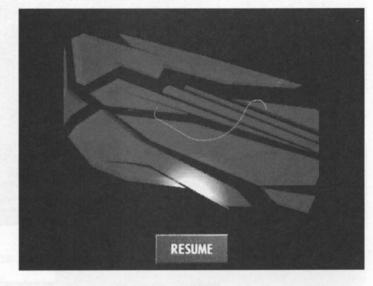




Beneath the window was broken glass. Looking closer, I found a shard of glass. *Now we're starting to get somewhere*, I thought. A closer examination revealed an interesting tidbit. Whoever broke into Rook's window left one of his hairs behind.

Apparently, our burglar is a carrot-top.

On the other side of the chain link fence, I found a putrid dumpster. Perched on the side was an old radio. I grabbed it and immediately popped out the batteries. I have a thing about batteries.



The Ultimate Appetite Suppressant But when it's not in your food, hair can be fun and quite educational too. For a P. I., anyway.

I used to think it was normal, taking batteries out of everything, keeping spare batteries in my pocket, etc. A couple months of therapy straightened me out. I still do it, of course, but now I *know* it's aberrant behaviour.

On a whim, I opened the dumpster. The smell was nearly fatal but the interior was unusually tidy. Little piles of garbage neatly sorted, and stacked. Wow. I've known obsessive-compulsive types. But whoever did this gets my Disorder of the Year award.

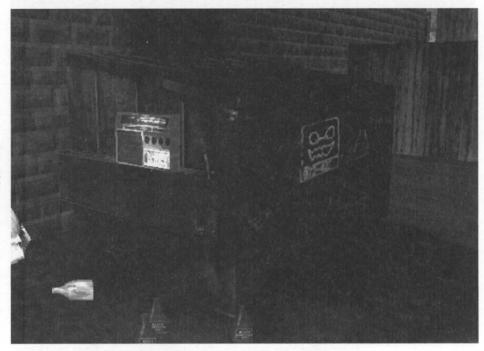
Then it hit me: Except for the filth and stench, the interior wasn't that much different from the average studio apartment in this part of town. In fact, it's nicely furnished. Someone's been living here . . . and I wonder if he saw anything last night.

I'll have to check back later.



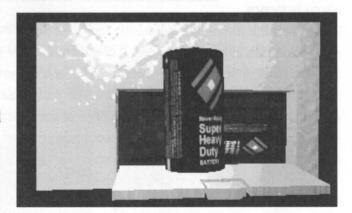


Cozy Studio, Furnished The dumpster's quite homey, and that radio's full of surprises.



The fire-escape proved to be a fascinating dead end, and the

rest of the alley trash was just trash — classic trash, maybe, but trash nonetheless. Still I was happy; I'd found some pretty good clues. In fact, things went so well I got kind of frisky with an old Weenie World

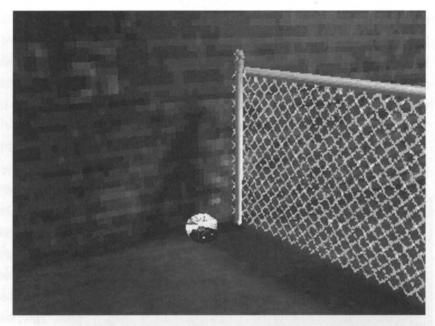


souvenir I found by the chain-link fence.

The pain should subside within days.





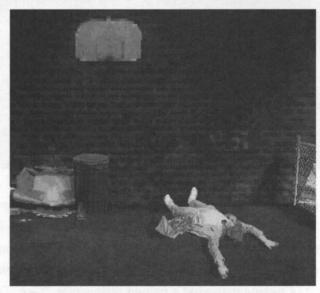


Here, Have a Ball
But remember,
things can get
pretty brutal in
the paint.

Office 1:50 PM

Back at the office, I've entered clues from my investigation into the Crime Link computer. It narrows the field somewhat, but still leaves a pretty big statistical sample of suspects. I need more leads.

Time for some old-fashioned gumshoe footwork.



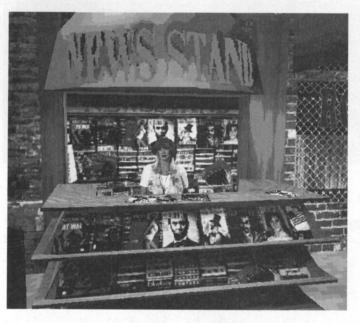




Chelsee's Newsstand 2:15 PM

First place I went was Chelsee Bando's, right across the street. Chelsee runs a first-rate newsstand, with a well-stocked selection of magazines. I wish I could afford to *buy* a couple. Life hasn't been the same since my *True Detective* subscription ran out.

Chelsee herself is a hot little number. I hear she's a mutant, but it doesn't show. The only weird thing about her is she won't go out with me.



"Well, hello stranger," she said as I sauntered cooly toward her.

I led off with some sophisticated innuendo. "Hey, sweetheart," I murmured in a shockingly m asculine tone. "Know anyone who could use my services today?"

She deflected with her usual flair. "Well, I guess that

depends on which services we're talking about, big guy."

When subtle innuendo fails, one should move directly to blatant innuendo. That's my creed, anyway. I said, "So why don't you join me for a drink . . . and I'll go over all the great *services* I have to offer."

Chelsee managed a pained little smile. "Gee, Tex. You know, that kind of talk could get you into trouble." She waggled a finger at me. "But I don't drink with customers."



what you

really want.





It was too much. What can I say? I'm just a big dumb guy who's been hopelessly pricked by cupid's arrow.

"Ahhh," I groaned, "it's painful the way you toy with my emotions, Chelsee."

She didn't skip a beat, as usual. "Oh, please, Tex," she said. "So is there something I can do for you?"

Yeah, I got the signal. Let's get to business, shall we? So I asked her point blank what she knew about the pawnshop burglary.



Good Eye
Chelsee's got
a direct
connection to
the street,
and she's a
keen observor
of human
nature.

"Yeah, Rook told me about it." she

said. "You know, I remember a stranger hanging around the past couple of days. It might be a dead end, but I seem to remember that the guy had these bright green eyes, and a tattoo of an anchor on his arm."

I had to smile. Chelsee didn't miss a thing. Ever.

Office 2:35 PM

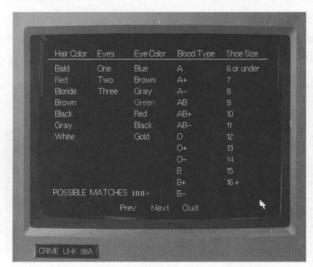
I thanked Chelsee and trotted back up to my Crime Link Computer. Once I got the info entered I could see I was closer, but not close enough. I needed a couple more pieces of data before I could zero in on any likely suspects.





Seems I've gone about as far as Chandler Avenue will take me on this case. But wait. Here it is, from the newsletter article on the pawnshop

Crime Link This little gadget plugs me into the on-line world of crime detection. But it's only as good as the information I feed it.



burglaries: "Lt. Malden would not specify, but said that his team of detectives had *some* evidence and hoped to have solid leads within the next few days."

Yeah, OK. Time to

visit old Mac.

Police Station 3:50 PM

I hadn't seen Mac since the Martian Memorandum case. I remembered him as a surly, incompetent, fat-nosed cop. As I stepped into his office, I could see he'd changed. His nose was even bigger. Geez, was it alive?

He spun around in his chair to face me, then lit a cigarette — a pure power move I had to admire. "Well," he said. "If it isn't Tex Murphy." He took a good drag, flashed a toothy yellow grin, and added, "I figured you'd be dead by now."

Without hesitation, I volleyed right back at him. "I could say the same about you. When's the last time you had your cholesterol checked?"





He bit off his grin. "Still the wise guy, eh Murphy? It was great to see



Mac's No
Knife
In fact, he's a
dull blade of a
guy. But he
can provide
some useful
leads, if you
provoke him
properly.

ya. Now get lost."

Didn't want to push him too far. I needed information so I plucked the strings of fond reminiscence. "Aw, come on. Remember the Martian Memorandum case? Hey, we made a swell team."

He gave a legitimate grin this time. The case had been a big feather in his cap, and he knew he owed me for it. He said, "Yeah, those were the days. I don't get cases like that anymore." His face tightened a bit. "Things are harder now. The mayor's office is all over me again. You heard about the string of pawnshop robberies? We have no suspects, and I'm catching the heat for it!"

Yeah, I could see it. He was under pressure, big-time. Here's where I took a calculated gamble. I remembered that the good lieutenant tends to blather mindlessly when his pride's been pricked. There's nothing more irritating to an inept cop than expressions of shock at his ineptitude.





I said, "So you and your crack team of detectives have no leads?"

"Of *course* we have leads, ya putz!" he bellowed. "We know he's a norm, Caucasian, and has AB-negative blood." He rubbed his temple, which no doubt ached. "That narrows down our list of suspects to about a *million*. Now get outta my hair, I got work to do!"

Office

4:30 PM

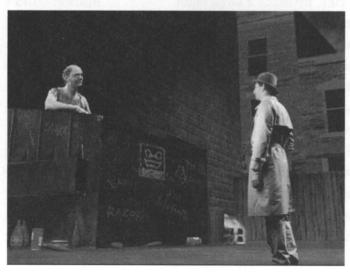
As I entered the latest information into the computer, I had high hopes. But the Crime Link still couldn't spit out a match list of less than a hundred suspects.

Guess I'd better check the crime scene once more. Maybe there's something I missed.

Alley (Behind Rook's Pawnshop) 4:45 PM

No wonder that putrid dumpster behind Rook's was so tidy. Somebody *lives* there.





Man, I've seen desperation. I mean, I've lived in a few rat-infested rowhouses, and done some things with food far beyond the posted expiration date. But this was the lowest.

Living in a dumpster!





I approached casually — you know, like I just happened to be *strolling down the alley*. The farce of this was not lost on Mr. Bum, who took a hit from his bottle and grunted: "Yeah, whattya want?"

It suddenly struck me that maybe we had more in common than I cared to admit. Maybe we were spiritual comrades, of a sort. In any case, I didn't think the ready insults that popped into my mind would get me very far, so I tried: "Looks like you're busy drowning your troubles, my good man."

"Well, Mr. High and Mighty," he spat. "What are you, a preacher or something?"

Despite the insult, I stayed friendly. "Good guess," I said. "Actually, I'm a gumshoe and I'm looking for some information."

"That's what I figured," he said with a carnivorous glint in his eyes. "You've got a fedora, a trench-coat . . . and you look broke."

My next impulse was to ram his chocolate bottle down his misanthropic gullet. But a good P.I. knows when to indulge such an urge, and when to bury it and pucker up. I counted to three, then said, "You've got quite an eye for detail."

"Well, I also figured there'd be a detective or two asking around about the robbery," he said in a semi-human fashion.

Again, I repressed my natural desire to insult the dirtbag, and instead said, "Yeah, Rook got hit pretty hard. I'm looking into the case and I could sure use some leads."

A visible spasm seized the guy for a moment. Then he rubbed his bald head — I swear I heard it squeak —



Not a Happy Camper Gee, are we giving Mr. Bum a headache?

and he muttered, "Listen, gumshoe. It'll be a cold day in hell





before I give out information for free."

I almost laughed. I had a pretty good idea what he wanted, but I said, "Well, I got some cash flow problems right now. But I'd be happy to write you an I.O.U."

That was it for Mr. Bum. "Listen, chump," he snarled. "Find me something I want . . . or my lips are sealed."

Now, I'm the first to admit that it doesn't always require a lot of brainpower to be a private eye. Sometimes, simply adding two and two together leads you right to four. In this case, it's clear that Mr. Bum is a world-class chocoholic. Just to be sure, though, I tried one more time.

"Oh no," he moaned, "not you again. Look, I'm warning you, I'm almost out of chocolate syrup, and I'm not in a good mood."

I'd had it with charitable posing. With my theory verified, I launched a cheerful assault. "Well, why don't you go *buy* some more," I said. "Oh, I forgot — you're a bum."

"Spare me the insults, tough guy," he said, shaking a fist at me. "If ya got something to say, *spill* it."

I was having fun now. "OK," I said. "But I'm with the Health Department, and I'll arrest you unless you answer some of my questions." "God, you are a pest!" he howled.

Yeah, time to leave poor Mr. Bum alone and pay a visit to Louie.

Brew & Stew 4:55 PM

The Brew & Stew is run by Louie LaMintz, a bloated mutant with a heart bigger than his waistline. He's a beautiful man — long as you keep your eyes off his face. The poor guy's gene code has spawned bizarre dermatological eruptions of a Vesuvian magnitude.

Despite that, *everyone* comes to Louie's cafe. So does all the street talk. If something's going on, Louie knows about it. He looked up from cleaning his fingernails. "What can I do for ya, Murph?" I straddled a stool





and said, "How about a pitcher of beer and the love of a good woman, Louie?"

"Can't help with the woman, Murph," he said, describing one with his hands. "No problem with the beer, though. Put it on your tab?"



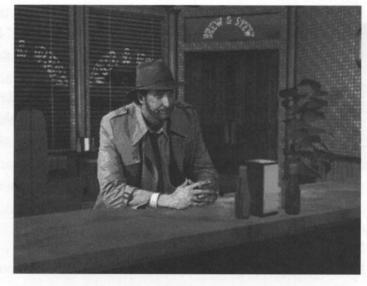
Brew &
Stew
This is where
I spend a lot
of my time. If
I ever paid off
my tab, Louie

could retire.

"Thanks, Louie," I said, thirsty and grateful. "I should have some work soon, then I'll be able to pay my tab off first thing."

Louie was almost insulted. "Don't worry about it, Murph," he said, waving it off. "I know you're good for it."

He set up a frothing golden pitcher and we commenced another in our



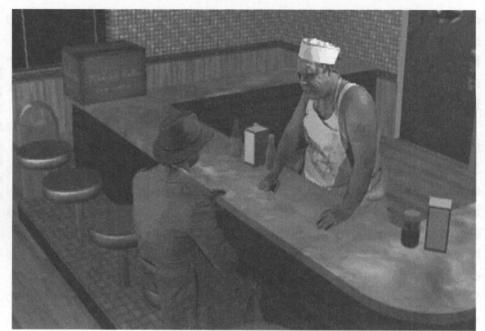
long line of philosophical discussions, focusing on the Big Questions. As usual, he chided me for my ontological leanings. And of course, I asked him about chocolate.

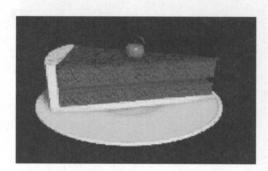




My Second Home

Louie's a good guy, his coffee's always hot, and I like his positions on Wittgenstein. His chocolate pie is addictive, too.





"You wanna try a slice of my chocolate pie?" he asked. "I can give you a piece to go if you like."

I took it gratefully.

"Louie," I said. "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Alley 5:30 PM

Pie in hand, I strolled back to Mr. Bum's alley. He was home, but not in a good way.

"This isn't a good time for a social call, punk," he gasped. "If I don't get a fix soon I'll go insane!" His contortions were pretty pathetic,





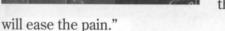
though kind of fun to watch. Jaws clenched, he started babbling, "Do re mi fa so la ti do . . . "



After all the abuse I'd taken from him, I found it hard to be even moderately compassionate. But I decided against prolonging his agony.

"I don't make a practice of helping out addicts," I said. "But I think I've

got something that



"Don't hold out on me, man," he blurted, pointing a shaky finger at me. "If you've got something, *let's have it*."

I offered him the pie.

"Praise heaven!" he howled. "You brought the ambrosia of life! Ask me *anything* you want."



Spasms
OK, he's not
Julie Andrews,
but I like his
act, especially
the way those
neat veins
pop out of
his forehead.

He knew what I wanted, but I asked anyway. And the grateful deadbeat wasted no time in answering. "I saw someone prowling around the back of the pawnshop last night. It was so dark, I didn't get a good look at him. But I could tell he was *huge*, probably six-three or six-four, about 300 pounds."

I put the pie on the ground and got out of the way.

As I hurried out of the alley, I heard the gut-wrenching sounds of his unholy feast.

Office

5:45 PM

Finally, a suspect! After dumping the bum's info into the Crime Link, I got a quick match. The goon's name is Mick Flemm, a petty criminal with a





long record of fraud, burglary, and theft dating back more than 20 years.

Hacking Up Flemm

After you bring up the Flemm file on your computer, here's what you get.





There's also an interesting note attached to the Flemm file. The big weasel's been implicated in the disappearance of Rusty Clown, owner of Rusty's Fun House just down Chandler Avenue. And apparently there's a street informant named Beek Nariz who's seen Flemm hanging about.

What kind of name is Beek?

Funny, I've never heard of the guy. I've never heard Louie mention him either. I'll check with Chelsee. If she doesn't know, I may have to do some serious brown-nosing down at SFPD — a prospect that I find most distasteful.

Newsstand 5:55 PM

It's kind of nice to have Chelsee's mental database at my disposal, although she's got some other files I'd really like to download. As I gazed into those big luminous eyes, I found myself drifting into a big, goofy state.

"What can I do for you, Tex?" she purred, leaning close over the counter.





Ignoring the screams of my flaming, shredded heart, I asked about Beek Nariz.

"Oh yeah,
I know Beek,"
she said. I wasn't
surprised. She
added, "If you
want to talk to
him, you might
try hanging out
around Coit
Tower."



Chelsee on Beek She knows everyone, it seems. What a gal.

I thanked her, and hurried off down the street. I was on the verge of cracking open my first case in more than a year. Yeah, OK, it was nickel-and-dime stuff. But it was real, it was honest, and maybe I could get a little positive momentum going.

At the Golden Gate Hotel I turned left, then squeezed through the gap in the fence to follow the scenic trail (known locally as *The Path of Death*) up to Coit Tower.

Coit Tower 6:30 PM

I walked up the steps to Coit Tower and spotted a small figure lurking in the shadows. In the half-light, I could see only the person's profile — but it's Beek Nariz, alright. At first sight of him, I nearly shrieked with hysterical laughter. Beek is what you might call nasally-challenged. His annual Kleenex bill must run him a few C-notes.





Why Do They Call Him Beek? Really. I don't get it. Am I missing something?



"What are you staring at?" he whined in what I suppose was meant to be a challenging manner.

I grinned. You had to admire the guy just for keeping his head

unbagged. "Pardon my staring," I said, "but that is a truly impressive schnozz you've got."

His Royal Prominence was immediately defensive. "Aw, come on, don't make fun, huh? Whattaya want? Who are ya?"

I thought I'd better establish my credentials. "I'm a friend of Chelsee Bando," I said. "She told me I could probably find you nosing around up here."

He brightened. "Yeah, yeah, Chelsee," he said with a smile. "Good egg, nice looker. So, uh, whattaya want?"

Time to cut a deal. I was broke, sure, but I figured I had something on me that would be far more attractive to a guy like Beek than just filthy lucre. "I need information and I'm willing to deal for it," I said.

"What's that?" he whined. "Deal? Well, I'm listening. Whatcha got?" I offered him the cosmetic surgery gift certificate.

"OK, I can use this!" he said with obvious enthusiasm. "My nose has started *sagging* lately. Makes it hard to breathe. Now what kind of info are ya looking for, hmmm?"







Coitus Informatus Beek's a great source of info. Just don't let him sneeze on you.

Beek turned out to be a veritable font of information. First, I asked about Mick Flemm.

"Mick Flemm's rap sheet would take a *day* to read!" whined Beek with obvious distaste. "He's a fat *scum!* And he's an idiot to boot. That's why he's always getting caught. He's been busted for burglary, mail fraud, arson, you name it! Everyone *knows* he operates out of the Snow White warehouse. But don't tell *him*."

The Snow White warehouse? Then I remembered. The Acme Warehouse on Chandler was formerly the Snow White Dry Cleaning building. Nobody'd used the place in quite a while — not officially, anyway. Beek seemed awfully knowledgeable, so I asked what he knew of the Rusty Clown disappearance. His reply was blunt, which is always my favorite kind of answer.

"I think he's dead," he said. "And I'll bet Mick Flemm had something to do with it. Word was that the two of them were smuggling illegal novelty items from Hong Kong... and Rusty crossed Flemm. Ever since





Rusty disappeared, Flemm has had a terrible fear of clowns."

Beek glanced around, then leaned forward for emphasis and said, "Bo-zo-phobia." He nodded. I made a mental note. "I once saw Flemm pretty drunk, and he said he had nightmares about Rusty's ghost coming back to haunt him from the grave. He was completely terrified."

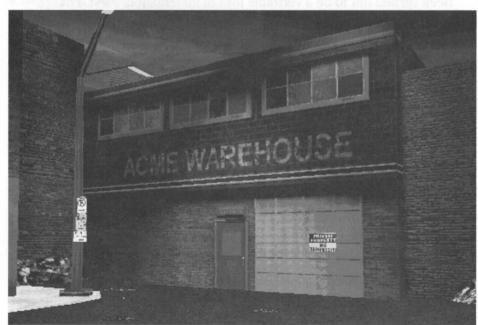
It was obvious where I had to go next. I thanked Beek, and ended a most enlightening conversation.

Acme Warehouse 7:15 PM

The old Acme Warehouse is not exactly the kind of place I like to spend my evening hours. It's an abandoned, run-down, vermin-infested hellhole. The only good thing I can say about it is that it isn't haunted.

Well. Not yet, anyway.









The front door was unlocked. Inside, a power box and a nearby storage compartment were both locked. I climbed stairs to a landing, where I noticed a huge pulley hook dangling on a track. I was about to head back downstairs when a dim glint of light caught my eye. Just under the hook, hanging on the wall, was a key.

I trotted back downstairs and tried the key on the storage compart-

ment first — no go. It *did* work on the power box, however. The door panel opened up to reveal an on/off lever. I gave it a yank. Something mechanical sprang to life up on the landing. The pulley hook was now running back and forth along a track.

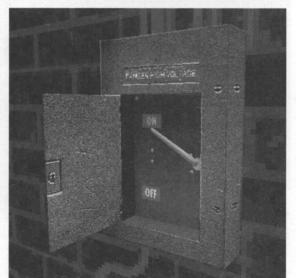
Hmmm. I was getting ideas. *Naughty* ideas.

I looked at a pile of crates nearby. They smelled like laun-

dry soap. The one in front, I noticed, was partially open. Geez, I hate to see things like that. Being the kind of guy I am, I finished the job. Inside, I found a vintage fireman uniform. I thought, *Cool*. I took it.



Pulley Key
See the big
pulley-hook up
in the corner?
Looks like a
key is hanging
below it on the
wall.



Pulley Control Box Here's the on/off switch for the pulley hook.





Crate Find
Apparently,
there's a naked
fireman
running around
the Greater
Bay Area
somewhere.



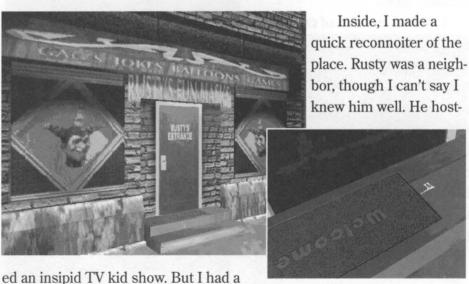


I'd seen what I needed. Now it was time to do some serious clowning around.

Rusty's Fun House 8:30 PM Rusty's door was locked and, of

course, I had no key. I cast a wary glance at the welcome mat. Anything on the doorstep of a novelty shop . . . well, you can never be too careful. In this case, however, I had nothing to fear and everything to gain.

Rusty's Fun House Locked. But what's that under the mat?



feeling about him. His stage laugh was just a little too perfect.





It resonated with failed therapy, bad group sessions. Trying to work out the clown thing. *The big red nose, Rusty. What's that all about, man?*

Anyway, the first thing I nabbed was a nifty dart crossbow from the front shelf. I couldn't resist the hideous Inspector Burns mask on the floor. I toyed with the in-house TV a bit, then scored a Rusty doll from the boxes on the floor. The thing



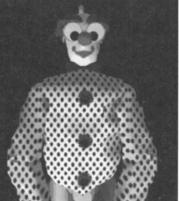
P. I. Pillage
Boy, there's a lot
of neat stuff here.
That crossbow
looks cool, and
check out the
Inspector Burns
mask on the
floor.

gave me the creeps. It also gave me an idea.

Didn't Beek mention something about Flemm's "bozophobia" fits?







No, No, No
Inspector Burns
says, Never play
with matches!
You'll end up a
waffle-faced
goon, just like
Inspector Burns.

Clown Clue Whoa, is that a Rusty doll in that box? Why, it sure is! Let's steal him!





By then, I'd really worked myself into a perverse *er*-Christmas spirit. The store was screaming to be *investigated* The plastic weaponry didn't appeal to me, but I did grab the stacking ring. I found a key taped to a corner column — *what does it open? Who cares?*

Look Closely

There's a key taped to that column. See it?
And check out that stacking ring under the weapons. What a significant find!





I tried the "Employee's Only" door. It was locked. I tried the key. Bingo.

Rusty's back room is covered with photography posters. Obviously, Rusty does a little image work on the side. One can only guess what kind. Of course, the first thing that really grabbed my attention was the suction dart on the wall, which shows you where *I'm* coming from.

I also found a balloon in the sink, strategically located near a water faucet. If Rusty went down, he didn't go down without a fight. I glanced

More Novelty Balloons in the sink, darts on the wall. This guy was a real clown.



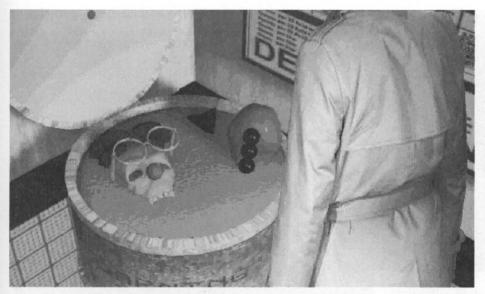
over at a 50-gallon drum of toxic chemicals — and I'm thinking, *Who* needs that many toxic chemicals?

Since I'm an investigator, I decided to investigate.

Guess who popped up?







Rusty Soup Here's another safety tip, kids. Don't ever get stuffed into a barrel of toxic acid.

Poor Rusty. What a way to go. And I'm willing to wager he didn't crawl in there on his own. Someone murdered him. If Mick Flemm did this to Rusty — and I'll bet my fedora he did — then I'm *really* going to enjoy the little event I'm about to perpetrate.

Warehouse

9:30 PM

It was getting late, and I knew rats like Mick Flemm would be crawling home to lick their wounds soon. So I got right to work. First, I pulled out the batteries I'd scavenged from Mr. Bum and popped them into the Rusty doll. Then I carefully hung Rusty-Redux on the pulley-hook.

And not a moment too soon. Suddenly, I heard heavy footsteps. It had to be Flemm, all 300 pounds of him. But I was ready. My Rusty-trap was all set.

I lept behind the stack of crates by the pulley-control box.

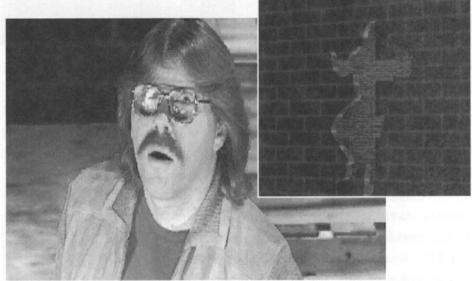








Clowning Around With Mick Here comes Rusty! And there goes Flemm!



I let Flemm go, knowing he'd be doing hard time with his nightmares soon enough. I grabbed his keys and Rook's bracelet, thinking: *Damn*, *I'm good*. Out of curiousity, I tried the keys on the locked storage compartment.

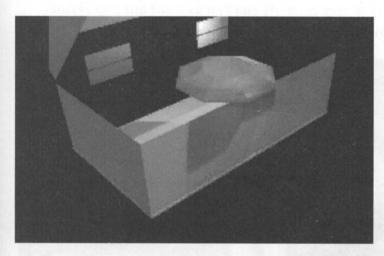
Voilá.





Hmm. A locked box within a locked box. I figured it must contain *something* worth having. None of Flemm's keys worked on it, though. But didn't I have another key? The one from the alley. Yes, it slid neatly into the lock.

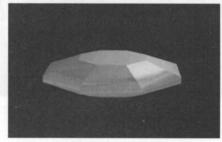
I gave it a twist. The box clicked open.



Holy carnuaba! I've never seen finer-quality jade. Oh, I've seen prettier shades of green, maybe — mostly in the eyes of women who

wouldn't give me a second look. This baby, however, was going home with me tonight.

I left the glow-in-the-dark Rusty Clown doll dangling from the pulley-hook in the dark, waiting to scare the bejesus out of a whole new generation of children. As I



Flemm's Strongbox Inside lies as lovely a piece of stone as you'll ever see.

strolled down Chandler Avenue back to my place . . . OK, I'll admit it, I felt like a new man.

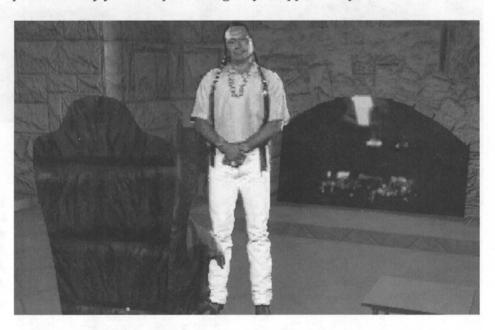




Epilogue: Day One

"I'm telling you, it's impossible! It can't be done. I've tried everything."

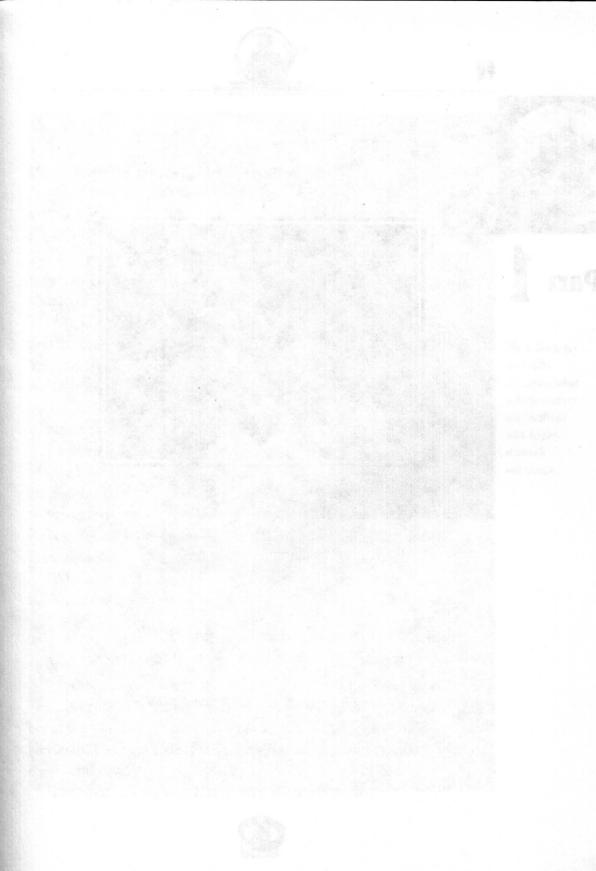
"The prophecy is very clear. We can't go on until this step is completed. Surely your unique skills give you opportunity."



"My ability . . . has gotten us nowhere. CAPRICORN got there before me. They're always one step ahead of me. It's like they can read my mind."

"We can't let them stop us. Maybe we can use your skills on someone else. I've made inquiries. And if he hasn't gotten himself killed . . . maybe he's just what we need. Murphy. Tex Murphy."







Part]







Case Log Transcript: 12-12-42

Office

8:00 AM

I haven't gotten out of bed this early in fifteen years. But I can't help it — I feel better today then I've felt in a long time. Boy, did I stun Rook when I walked in and handed him that bracelet.

OK, maybe getting the bracelet back doesn't make me Detective of the Year. But it does stimulate the confidence glands.
Maybe I can succeed at this business and turn my



He's Baa-a-a-a-ck!

Amazing what a little success and caffeine will do for a man's self-image.

career around. If I'm gonna do that, I'd better do something about my fax machine.

Who knows how many new opportunities I've missed to show the world my greatness?

Office

8:15 AM

Yeah, everything's flowing the right way for once. As I was standing at the window, sipping java, an envelope slid under the door. Normally, I fear mail. But I'm a man again, darn it, and I tore it open manfully.

Enclosed was my new Electronics Shop credit card.





The Power of Plastic

I give this thing to peoble, and they give me stuff back. What a concept!



Electronics Shop 9:15 AM

Lord, it was torture waiting for the store to open.

I got so anxious I drank about twelve more cups

of thick, rich Hearty Boys coffee. Now my right eyelid's going nuts, and I can't stray farther than 25 feet from the restroom.

I stood outside the Electronics Shop at 8:59, bouncing around, count-

Electronic Shop

It's new, it's expensive. and it's right next door. What more could you ask?



ing seconds. The store has one of those newfangled card-access doors. At 9:00, it beeped and I rammed my card in the slot. The door hissed open.

Inside, I browsed for awhile in a stunned. consumeristic fog. Like I

said before, the outlet had just moved into the neighborhood. Everyone

knows they sell overpriced junk, but it is conveniently located. I've heard that the manager's name is Hamm Underwood.

The shelves are stocked with truly weird

Cool! Heh heh. But what is it?



stuff remote control gadgets



of an indeterminate nature, infrared visors, a Rodent Tracker 8000 ("Because Household Pests Never Build Up an

Immunity to Bullets!"), an eery Plasma Ball (marked down to an affordable \$18,039.99), and something that appears to be a core sample





from an old sofa.

Ah, but there's a new fax machine. Just what the doctor ordered.

Later (9:30 AM)

I finally sidled up to Hamm Underwood. He smiled and nodded at a space to my left. I looked around. Nobody else was in the store. When I turned back, he suddenly shouted, "Hi there! How can I help you?"

Well, I hate exuberant crosseyed little fat guys. I decided to keep a low profile. "Oh, I just dropped by to check out your store here," I said, glancing around with a purposely vacant stare.

"Well, feel free to browse!" he said. "Though, since you're a Blue Card member, you'll have to choose from the Blue Light Special items." He pointed off to my left. But when I saw just how crosseyed he was, I figured

he meant my right, in the Blue Box I'd just been examining. "Well-I-I-I, what are you looking for?"

I had an urge to be disrespectful, but I'd come for essential office machinery, so I simply said, "Do you have fax machines?"

"Sure do!" said the jolly idiot. "In fact, there's one older model in the Blue Light Special box." Again, he pointed off to my left. But I knew where he meant.

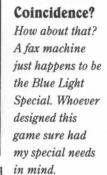
I headed to the Blue Light Special box, used my card, and walked out with a brand new outdated fax machine. Is this a great country, or what?

Office 9:55 AM

As soon as I hooked up the new fax machine, a fax printed out. Finally! And maybe this is a real case. The kind you get paid for.



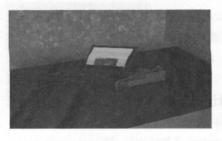
What a Hamm! He's friendly, knowledgeable, and annoying beyond the capacity for man to reason.







Just the Fax, M'am My new fax machine offers me work immediately. Wow, I didn't know they could do



Eagerly, I examined the transmission. It read:

FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION
TO: Tex Murphy P.I.
FROM: Countess M. Renier

ACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

O Tex Murphy P.I.
ROM: Countess M. Renier

Dear Mr. Murphy:

You have been recommended to me as someone capable of handling delicate matters with both competence and discretion. I am prepared to pay you handsomely in exchange for your services.

I would prefer to give you details in person. I do not wish to seem impertinent, but time is of the essence. Please meet me at my residence as soon as possible. The address is 1329 Fillmore, Pacific Heights.

Countess M. Renier

Dear Mr. Murphy:

You have been recommended to me as someone capable of handling delicate matters with both competence and discretion. I am prepared to pay you hand-somely in exchange for your services.

I would prefer to give you details in person. I do not wish to seem impertinent, but time is of the essence. Please meet me at my residence as soon as possible. The address is 1329 Fillmore, Pacific Heights.

Countess Renier

A Countess in the Heights, eh? I've always been a big fan of royalty. Duke Ellington. Prince. Larry King. Hey, I like feudal systems. They make sense. I think every politician should have a castle with a moat.

Whoops, I'm babbling into the dictaphone again. I'd better visit Her Highness and scam a job before Hamm comes to repossess the fax machine.





Mansion of Countess Renier 10:30 AM

As my speeder approached 1329 Fillmore, I saw a cozy little four-star hotel off to my right. I circled it a couple of times, looking for a residential neighborhood, wondering *Where's the #\$!!*&!! house?* Then it hit me: The hotel was 1329 Fillmore, home of Countess Renier.

Countess Renier. That name smacks of money. I hoped she didn't want to hire me to find her lost poodle. As I landed my speeder I marveled at the mansion — my dream house, only bigger.

The butler was a tall, thin man about seventy. He told me the Countess was expecting me and showed me into a large, lavishly furnished drawing room.

As I stood ogling the digs, a gorgeous blonde in a flowing lavender gown walked into the room. I say "walked" . . . but then I couldn't see her feet, and her movement across the floor suggested a mode of travel based on advanced hovercraft technology. Elegant, is the word. All class. In other words, the polar opposite of everything I represent.

"I'm the Countess Renier," she said with pure finishing school poise. "Please . . . have a seat."

"Thank you," I said. I slumped into a velvet upright behind me and crossed my legs, proudly displaying my brandnew pair of Nike cross-trainers. I looked at her and said, "You know, I'd pictured you being, well... older and heavier."

"No one is born old, Mr. Murphy," she said cooly. "Now,

Drawing
Room Drama
Why do rich
people always
have really
uncomfortable
chairs?

shall we discuss our business while we're still young?"

This gal was cucumber cool. "Oh, by all means," I said. "Pardon my interruption."





She moved regally to a chair opposite mine. "Your services have been recommended to me by a trusted friend, who prefers to remain anonymous," she said. As she sat, she gave her gown a quick tug — unveiling a very well-aerobicized set of gams. I tried not to look. Really, I tried. She continued: "Suffice it to say that your 'unique' abilities are what I need right now."

Countess Renier She's a snob, but she's got good qualities. Maybe I'll take her bowling sometime.



"Uh, which of my unique abilities are you referring to?" I asked.

"I'm sure you have many unique abilities," she said with a snotty laugh. It was so cute. "The one I would hire you for is your talent of locating people and things." Oh, that one. "I've been told this talent has made you some friends — and many enemies."

I decided to surprise her with the depth of my cultural erudition. "Well, correct me if I'm wrong, Countess, but wasn't it Roy Rogers who once said, 'You can't please all the people all the time."

A hard look suddenly lept into her eyes. "Save your homespun humor for a more gullible woman," she said icily. "What I'm asking you to do may make you very unpopular with some people."

"Exactly how unpopular are we talking?"

"Let me give you some background information, then you can decide for yourself," she said — a bit wearily, I thought. This gal needs to get more sleep. "Some time ago, a family heirloom was stolen from this bungalow."

I thought, Bungalow?

I guess that makes the Hearst Castle a summer cottage.







Bungalow Chat Isn't this quaint? Care for a crumpet?

She continued: "I do keep most of my valuables on my estate in Europe, but on this visit, I brought the piece to show a friend. Within hours of my arrival I found it stolen! I've made extensive inquiries trying to retrieve it, but I have found out nothing."

Extensive inquiries? "Well, I'm sure you have more resources — talking about cash — than I do," I said. "You should be able to buy the information you need. What makes you think that I can help you?"

"Oh, I don't," she said with a smug little laugh. "I remembered what my friend had told me about you after I'd exhausted every other option."

Interesting. She got up — levitated, it seemed — and floated across the room. I followed. "You know," I said, "referring to me as your 'last option' could automatically double my fee."

"I already planned on paying you much more than your usual fee," she said with a smile. "I'm a wealthy young woman, Mr. Murphy. To give you an idea, the stolen artifact alone is worth more money than you could earn in ten lifetimes."





"Oh, we'll see about that," I grinned, "when I win the Clearinghouse Sweepstakes."

She laughed politely — or maybe not so politely. It's hard for me to tell, being such a lowly plebe and all. Then she said, "How quaint." Yeah, now that I think of it, perhaps there was a wee touch of disdain in her tone. "Let's not waste any more time. I need some work done and I'll pay vou well for it."

I shifted into negotiating mode. The Colonel had taught me to let the prospective client toss out the first football. "Well, in my experience, getting paid well is a relative term," I said.

She looked me in the eye. "Your obsession with money is appalling," she said.

Rich people always say things like that. We poverty-level types are then supposed to feel guilty that we're so shallow, so barren of spirit. "Oh,

I have any number of appalling traits," I said. "But I am a good P. I."

She Loves Me. She Loves Me Not Well, OK not. But look, she's smiling. That's a good sign, isn't it?



"Well, if you prove to be as good as you think you are, I'll pay you a \$30,000 finder's fee," she said casually.

My knees nearly buckled, but I'd once read that thrashing about like a squid on the floor is not a good negotiating posture. "Well, let me think about it . . . OK, I'll do it," I said, trying not to hyperventilate.

"In fact, I'll even mow your lawn at no charge."

Yeah, she had herself a hired goon now. And her tone reflected all the unpleasant weight that goes with such a position. "Try to control yourself, Mr. Murphy," she said. "I'll expect you to focus all of your energies on this job. And, the methods you use to retrieve the artifact are of no interest to me."

Now, I love a bloodless, cutthroat woman as much as the next guy,





but I was feeling a distinct chill in the room. The Countess continued, saying, "But as more time elapses, the less likely it is that the item will be found — and for that reason, I must require you to find it and return it to me within one week. After that, there will be no finder's fee available to you."

"Do you pay time-and-a-half after forty hours?" I cracked. No response. "That's ... that's a joke."

She said, "I have stated my conditions. As to the artifact itself, it is a beautiful statuette made of crystal and shaped in the form of a bird. It has been in my family for countless generations and, as I said, it is extremely valuable. There are many collectors who would stop at nothing to own it. Whoever stole the statuette would undoubtedly have gone to the black market and offered it to the highest bidder."

I was giddy with delight. A job! I rubbed my chin and said, "Hmmm, I think I saw the statuette you're talking about. Someone was selling it on the Home Shopping Network. Boy, I had no idea it was so expensive."

She stared at the floor for a moment. "You make jokes," she said. "But you cannot possibly know how rare and valuable the statuette is. And now that you have all the necessary information, we'll end this charming visit."

Oh, by all means, I thought.

"Don't bother contacting me until you have the statuette in your possession," she said dismissively. But suddenly, her tone shifted. "And, if you are successful in your search, it could change my opinion of you considerably."

Whoa! She loves me. I knew it.

"My valet will give you a retainer of \$1000 on your way out," she said. "Goodbye, Mr. Murphy."

I didn't tell the Countess, but I would've done damn near anything for \$30,000. Now I've got to find a link to the black market.

How hard can it be?





Street

11:25 AM

Wow. A thousand clams in my pocket, and it's not even lunch time yet.

When in doubt, I always go to Chelsee. I don't know where she gets all her information — frankly, I don't want to know — but she's tapped into more data networks than the damn phone company.

As I walked up, she called out, "Hey, I heard you took care of Rook." She grinned. "Pretty impressive."

"Oh, it was nothing," I said with manly modesty. "Just another day at the office."

"You know, Tex, it must take quite an effort to be lonely, broke, and still so smug," she said.

That's Chelsee. Never give you an inch. Usually, I take it nobly. But for some reason, I was feeling a little fragile after the ego-lashing I'd just received from Her Most Holy Countessness. An indignant reply shot out before I knew what I was saying.

"Hey, I don't like being broke," I said. "Why don't you lay off the insults and help me find some work?"

I don't think Chelsee was used to seeing the Vulnerable Boy Inside Tex. It nudged her off-stride for the first time I can ever recall. She said, "Sorry, Tex. Look, I'm just kidding ya. You know I'll tell you if I hear of anything."

I felt embarrassed. I cooled my jets and said, "Well, I'd appreciate it."

"So . . . is there something you came to ask me about?" she said.

I figured it was a long shot, but I asked her about the statuette. Chelsee's street connections wouldn't know about big-time stuff, I thought. Nor could they steer me into the black market's inner sanctum. Maybe she could connect me up a level or two.

But Chelsee surprised me again. "Apparently, it's a real hot item," she said. "The top commodities dealer in the city is Franco Franco. He probably either has the statuette . . . or knows who has it."





"You never cease to amaze me, babe," I said, shaking my head. "So where does this double Franco hang his hat?"

She shook her head. "I don't know how you're gonna find him," she said, looking a little uneasy. "But if you do . . . be careful?"

Police Station 12:10 PM

Ah, another refreshing intellectual exchange with Mac Malden. I feel so lucid now.

When I walked in his office, he practically leaped out of his chair. "Hey Murphy, guess what?" he said. "We got the guy who robbed those pawnshops." Mac was tickled pink with himself. It was disgusting. "Turned himself in, can you believe it? Kept babbling about some clown coming back from the dead to haunt him." He laughed.



Macky's
Back!
Lt. Malden is
having a
really good
nose day.
Take
advantage
of his good
mood.





Gosh, he was just so cute and happy, I couldn't see bursting his bubble with the truth about the engineering genius behind Flemm's miraculous surrender. But I couldn't resist a minor dig, so I said, "Well, I'm sure you would have caught him anyway. Knowing that you were on his trail probably drove him over the edge."

Big Mac's pretty obtuse about sarcasm. He said, "That butt-kissing of yours must be a hard habit to break, eh Murphy? You must want something. What?"

I rolled my eyes and asked about Franco Franco.

Malden got serious. "He's a big-time crook," he said. "Deals with stolen and illegally imported merchandise — especially jade."

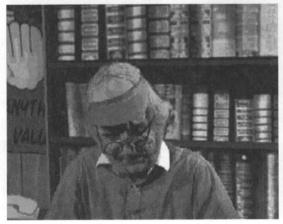
Jade? Gee, do I know anybody with any jade?

I left with a big grin on my face. But I still didn't know where to find the guy. Malden was clueless about that, as usual. Maybe Rook can help. He deals with precious gems on a regular basis.

Pawnshop 1:00 PM

Rook actually treated me with a semblance of respect when I walked in his door this time. He said, "What else can I help you with, Murphy?"





I squinted at him until I realized he was actually being friendly. Then I asked, "What can you tell me about a character named Franco Franco?"

"Big time crook," said Rook with a little smile. "Deals with a lot of smuggled artifacts and the like." He gave me a canny look. "He's





pretty well-connected with the Mob and black market here in San Francisco."

But he couldn't tell me where to find Franco. Apparently, the guy keeps a low profile. I figured I'd have to work my way through the underground to get to him, so I asked Rook if he knew any buyers interested in jade.

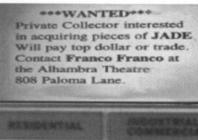
"You know, I subscribe to a trade paper called *Jewelry Weekly*," he said. "In the last issue it seems to me I saw an advertisement by someone named Franco who was looking to buy jade. There wasn't anything of interest in the trade paper so I threw it out." He nodded toward the alley. "It's probably still in the trash can out back."

I headed out into the alley, thinking: Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas, Mr Lucky P. I.

Alley 1:10 PM

Digging through garbage is one of the really swell fringe benefits of my job. With a nod to my good buddy Mr. Bum, I headed for Rook's trash can





Scavenger Hunt

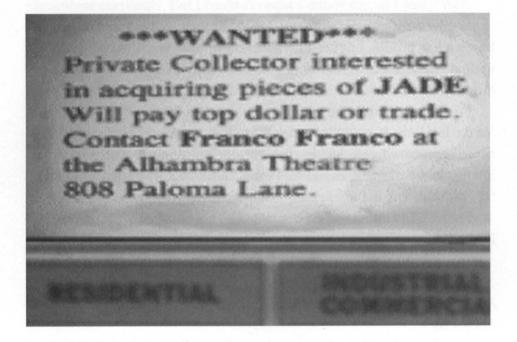
You can find the most interesting things in rancid piles of garbage.

in the back corner of the alley. It was a "Recyclable Papers Only" can — finally, a glimmer of ecological responsibility. I didn't know Rook cared. I yanked off the lid.





Fortunately, the trade paper was sitting neatly on top of the pile. I grabbed it, flipped it open, and found Franco's ad:



Alhambra Theatre

2:15 PM

Being a movie buff, I'd heard of the Alhambra Theatre, though I'd also heard it was closed down years ago. Sure enough, it was boarded up. But one of the back doors was unlocked. As soon as I stepped inside, two lugs the size of refrigerators grabbed me.

I told them that I had something for Mr. Franco, and one of them walked off. He came back a minute later and escorted me into the main theater.

A Buster Keaton flick was playing. The place was empty, except for a man sitting by himself at the front of the theater. I slouched up the aisle, dropped into a seat behind him, and enjoyed the feature for awhile.





After a few minutes, the guy turned slightly and, without looking at me, said, "Welcome . . . Mr. Murphy."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Franco," I said. "Tell me, do you do most of your business in dark theaters?"

"How and where I do my business is not your concern, Mr. Private Eye," he said casually. Then, wrapping his coat a little tighter he added, "As I'm sure you know, I'm strictly a legitimate business man."

I nearly guffawed. "Yeah. And I'm Miss America."

He laughed and said, "You must've done awfully well in the talent competition." I had to hand it to him, it was a damn nice comeback.

"I have an amazing baton-twirling routine," I



Franco Franco

Even scummy bad guys like Franco have fun sometimes. See? He's smiling.

said. "But let's not get into each other's little secrets, eh?"

He made brief eye contact. "I'm glad to hear you say that," he said. "People who pry into my dealings have a way of ending up at the bottom of the Bay."

I was having fun, I have to admit. "Hmm," I said. "That sounds so odd. I wonder how they got there?"

This time Franco turned all the way to me. "Use your imagination," he said. He turned slowly back to Buster, who was running around with a barrel over his head. Then he added, "If you have one."

Uh oh. Fun time over. In a grim tone, he said, "Now for our transaction. You have the item?"

I handed him the jade. It hurt, but hey, that's business.

Franco's eyes lit up like gems themselves. He fawned over the piece for a moment. "Ah-h-h," he moaned. "A lovely specimen. It will





make a fine addition to my collection." Then he popped the stone in his pocket. "Now," he said, holding up a single finger, "I will answer one ques-

Don't Get Greedy! Or you'll end up here, chatting with the Big P. I. In The Sky. (When that voice tells you to "fulfill your destiny"... does it sound familiar?)



tion to the best of my knowledge."
I thought, One question? That's all I get for a flawless piece of jade? I was almost ready to get greedy when I caught a glimpse of the two door goons lurking in the shadows. OK, Murphy, I said to myself. One question.

"There's a statuette in the shape of a bird that recently came onto the market," I said. "You know who has it?"

"Hmmm," he said. "I know the statuette you're referring to. There were several bidders for it." He stroked his chin. "But I believe it ended up in the hands of Eddie Ching." Something about this suddenly troubled Franco. His face shut tight and he said, "I can say no more about it."

Eddie Ching? I'd heard the name before, but I couldn't place it exactly. "There," said Franco. "I've fulfilled my part of the bargain." He turned and pointed sharply at me. "Don't contact me again. Unless of course" — he grinned broadly — "you find another fine piece of jade." With a final gesture, he said, "You know the way out."

Office 3:35 PM

Actually, my dealings with Mr. Franco Squared weren't quite finished. As I hurried into my office to start researching this Eddie Ching





fellow, my fax machine spit out a message from Franco with a nice little tip. I've heard stuff about the Knickerbocker before. As Franco said, it's pretty highrent, high-security. Getting in won't be easy — but it won't do me any good if I can't find Ching's apartment. Maybe Franco's right. Time to

smooth up Mac Malden again. I hate doing that.

Dear Mr. Murphy:

Concerning our recent discussion, I have some information you may find helpful. While it won't profit me to tell you this, I would not be entirely unhappy to see Eddie Ching come out on the short end for once. Like most everyone else in this city, I know very little about Ching, but I've been told that he lives in a luxurious, high-security apartment building called the Knickerbocker. A number of powerful underworld figures live there. I don't know which apartment Ching lives in, but if you have connections with the Police, they may be able to help you.

Franco Franco

Franco's Fax

Better than flowers. What a thoughtful guy!

Police Station 4:20 PM

Mac was in an ungodly good mood. It was like he was almost happy to see me. "Back again, eh Murphy? What can I help you with?"

I got right to the point. "What do you know about Eddie Ching?"

Mac's smile faded quick. "Ching's a dangerous customer," he said. "He's responsible for half the crime in the city. I'm pretty sure he owns the Police Commissioner — we've been told to lay off him."

I nodded. "Yeah," I said. "Listen, I hear he lives in the Knickerbocker. That right?"

Malden snorted. "Hell, that place is home to more major crime figures than anyplace on the planet. Yeah, Eddie Ching lives there on the entire top floor."

I turned to go. "Thanks, Mac."

"Murphy?" he said.

I turned back. "Yeah?"

"Be careful."

"Oh, you know me." I grinned. "Thanks, Mac."





Knickerbocker 6:00 PM

I waited for dark to fall. Fortunately, it's mid-December, and the day wanes early. After landing on the roof pad, I found it pretty easy to rappel down to the ledge outside Ching's. I was lucky, too — it looked like nobody was home.

This was gonna be easier than falling off a horse — or so I thought. But the window didn't want to open up. I thought, Maybe if I —

Murphy the Magnificent

Nothing like a little trampoline work to get the old juices flowing.





When I stopped bouncing off the awning two floors below

Ching's place, I realized it would take more than sheer strength to get into the apartment. Luckily, I noticed something that might help as I bounced by . A sticker on Ching's window said, "Security System installed by Underwood, Incorporated."

That couldn't be Hamm Underwood, my neighbor at the Electronics Shop . . . could it?

Electronics Shop 6:35 PM

Hamm was his usual obsequious, distended self. "Back again, eh?" he





exuded. I can't tell you how much I hate exuders. "What can I do for you?"

I quickly ran through my mental catalog of cheeseball openers and decided on the fraternal approach. "I understand that you and I are in the same line of 'moonlighting work'," I said.

He was delighted. "Really? You do security systems, too?"

I went through my mental catalog of lies, bluffs, and misinformation techniques . . . and decided to stall. "Well, sometimes," I said. "Here, let me see if I can find one of my business cards." I dug pathetically through my pockets until Hamm cut in.

"Oh, don't worry about it," he said charitably. "I always misplace my business cards, too. What types of security systems have you worked with?"



Hamm
and
Cheese
Man, my
misplaced
business card
diversion
works every

time.

Uh oh. "Let's see." I ran through my mental catalog of case history files. Maybe I could actually not lie. "Uh . . .the last job I had was the laser security system at Big Dick's Casino on Mars."

"I've heard that's a neat system," he bubbled. "But it's nothing compared to the one I just put in."

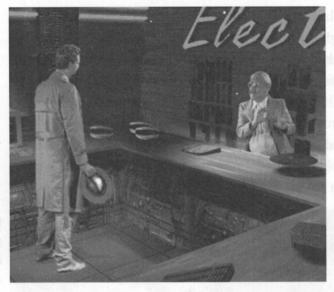
Time for a little manly bravado. "I'll have you know that I've beaten every security system ever made," I blustered, poking my hat for emphasis.





One Smug Hamm Yeah, he's

Yeah, he's
pretty sure his
security
system is
burglar-proof.
But I say
there's no
such thing.



This did the trick.

"Well," he began,
leaning forward.

"After I installed this
system, I tried to
beat it but I couldn't.
First, the only possible way to enter the
building would be to
land on the roof and
rappel down."

I'm way ahead of you, pal.

"Then you'd have

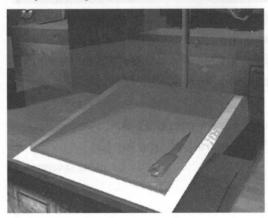
to cut through the LCD alarm glass," he added. "Well, that's not too hard. In fact, I sell a laser blade here that would do it."

Gee. Is that right?

"But, once you're inside, see, every room is flooded with a net of heat and motion-sensing beams that could turn an elephant into a brick of carbon! Believe me, it's burglar-proof." Hamm suddenly sensed that perhaps he'd gone just a tad too far. "Uh . . . listen. This system is top secret, so let's just keep this between us."

Laserblade 2000

Hamm says
this blade could
cut through
LCD alarm
glass. Now why
would anyone
want to
do that?



Oh yeah, of course, you bet. You won't believe this . . . but the Laserblade 2000 just happened to be the Blue Light Special today. I whipped out my credit card, grabbed the glorified little glass cutter, and headed back to the Knickerbocker.





Knickerbocker (Eddie Ching's Library) 7:20 PM

Armed with a chintzy Electronics Shop laserblade, I landed my speeder on the roof of the Knickerbocker for the second time tonight.

Hoping for the best, I rappeled down the side again and pulled out the laserblade. The laser beam cut through the LCD glass like it was butter. I gingerly crawled through the hole in the window . . . and now I find myself inside Eddie Ching's

library.

Either Hamm exaggerated or the laser fields aren't turned on. This must be my lucky day.

Since this is a library, I took a peek at the bookshelf first. At the top sat a book



Knickerbocker, Shmickerbocker Getting in was a piece of cake, Now

the big question — can I get out?

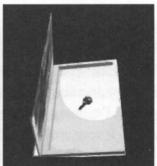
that seemed somehow out of place. I pulled it down; it was Carroll's classic *Through the Looking Glass*.

As I hefted it, though, it felt light. There was definitely something different about the book. Just call it a P. I.'s instinct. I opened it.

Aha! I knew it. A key.







Key Reading Material

Nice bookshelf.
Say, isn't that
book up on
top awfully
suspicious, just
sitting there all
by itself?





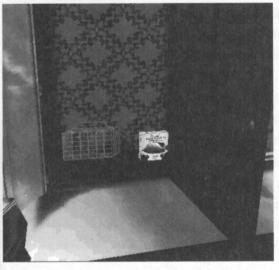
But what's it open? I looked around. There was an impressive closet door to the left of the entry door. I pulled it open. Inside, I found a heavy-duty metal geigger trap that looked sturdy enough for the roaches in my office. Next to it sat a box of clownfish confetti food that smelled like cotton candy.

I confiscated both.

Next, I turned my attention to the rest of the lavishly appointed room. The aquarium had less algae in it than my water cooler

Antics
My job doesn't
pay too well,
but it does
provide free
access to
mobster closets
and all the fish
flakes I can eat.





back at the office. I started to sprinkle Freddie's Fish Flakes on the little aquatic parasites, but the cotton candy smell was too irresistable.

Nothing else proved of interest, so I headed out into the hallway.

Hallway 7:35 PM

I'm now standing in the hallway, and I've turned on my case log dictaphone. I'm going to leave it running, and whisper notes to myself as I go along. It may prove helpful later.

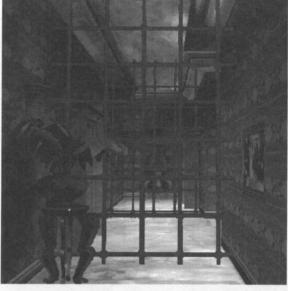
OK, Hamm's lasernets are clearly visible.





There's a power box down at the far end with a button flashing. Maybe if I can hit that button, it'll turn off the lasernets.
But how?

I'm checking the inventory of detritus I've collected in my trench-coat pockets. I'm dropping stuff. Now I'm picking stuff up. I'm looking at the stuff. Isn't this exciting?



Lasernet
Nothing can
get through
this deadly
grid except
something
really small
like, say, a
plastic dart.

Ah, wait . . . the dart crossbow. Yes. I happen to be quite proficient with non-lethal plastic weaponry. I load it, fire, and zap!

Man. This security system is tough. My brilliant shot didn't turn off the beams — it just popped open the power box. Hmmm . . . looks like there's a lever that needs to be pulled down. Hopefully my old horseshoe-

tossing skills haven't left me.

I pull out the stacking ring I nabbed from Rusty's. But it feels awfully light,





Nice Shot See? Childhood is indeed a critical training period for the average P. I.

and I need something with enough weight to pull down the switch. I fondle the ring for second. You know, I had a set just like this one when I was a little P. I. It even has a small hole in it. Man! Fill one of these with water and you can chuck it a mile!

Water? Did I just say water?





Yes I did.

Are you sure?

Yes, I'm sure.

OK, so I'm turning off the dictaphone now, because I'm giving myself the creeping willies with this psychotic self-dialogue.

Library 7:40 PM

Back in the library, I've just dunked the stacking ring in the aquarium, filling it with water. Now I'm going to try it on the power box lever back in the hallway.

Dunkin' Donut

After a yummy snack, fill your stacking ring in this aquarium You'll end up with a projectile heavy enough to take down a rhino at 40 paces.



Hallway 7:45 PM

It worked beautifully.

After the lasernet deactivated, I went down to the door on the right side of the hallway. But I could hear voices coming from the other side. It must be the front door to the apartment . . . and that probably means goons galore.

The only door on the other side of the hall must lead back into Ching's living area. I'm standing in front of it now. Something tells me the trail to the statuette leads right through this door.





Study 8:45 PM

Interesting things abound in Ching's study. The works of art, in particular. I glanced at one, thinking, Why, these paintings are great! Just look at the nudity! Man, I really need to visit more museums.

Anyway, I couldn't resist feeling the texture of the brushstrokes . . . and suddenly, the painting moved! Behind it, I found an Ultra Safe 8000.

Less inspiring was the sight of a disgusting, smelly little geigger in the terrarium. These buggers are land piranha. It's illegal to even own one — but I don't suppose the fear of being busted for misde-

meanor geigger possession keeps Eddie Ching awake nights. Then again, they're

Then again, they're loads of fun at toga parties — sorta cute in a slash-your-throat, tear-the-meat-off-your-bones kind of way.

Since I'm standing



Ching's
Hidden
Safe
Well, I guess
art's good for
something
after all. But
where's the
combination
to the safe?



Down,
Boy!
Geiggers are
nasty and
voracious.
They give the
lizard family
a bad name.

here with a geigger trap in my hand, I might as well use the darn thing. But how can I lure the slimy pest into the cage?

I found my answer behind one of the marble obelisks.

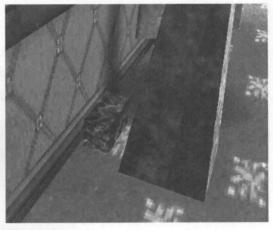




Mmmm. Geigger Chow

It's got real roast beef flavor and makes its own rich gravy. Why do they spell it that way on the backage, though?





Here Geigger, Geigger, Geigger!

Come to poppa, you cute, slavering little pus ball.



I put the chow in the cage, set the baited trap by the terrarium door, and scored me a geigger.

But my investigation of this room was just beginning. I caught sight of a sheet of paper under a table, snatched it up. It was a fax

to Eddie Ching from his mom. Real heartwarming stuff.

I thought, it's a birthday fax. Some quick math gave me Ching's birth

Fax of Life

See that fax on the floor under the table? It's from Momma Ching!



FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

10/14/42 E. Ching DATE:

Happy 30th Birthday! I wish I could be then with you on your special day. Since I can't. I decided to write you a hirthday poem:

Roses are Red Sunflowers are Golden

I'll buy you a present

When I get parolled in eight or nine years.

Love, Mom

date — since he was 30 years old on 10-14-42, he must've been born



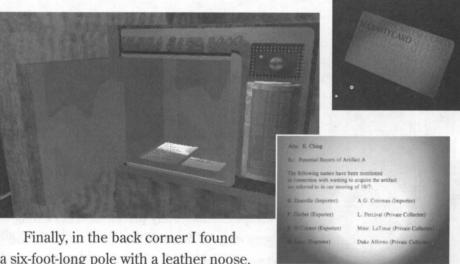


on 10-14-12. Say, I've used my birth date as the PIN on every bank card I've ever owned. Why would Eddie be any different?

I went back to the safe and tried Ching's birth date on the combination lock.

Bingo.

Inside the safe I found a security card and a list of bidders for the artifact, I examined the names, L. Percival? Sounds familiar.



Safe Contents Surely "Artifact A" is the crystal bird. But what does the security card open?

a six-foot-long pole with a leather noose.

Just above the noose, in an oddly out-of-the-way place, was a mirror. When I slid it down, I found a solid steel switch lock. When I tried the key I'd found in Through the Looking Glass, I heard a loud rumble. It sounded like something big moved back the library!

Secret Room 10:45 pm

I hustled back into the library. The bookcase had rolled aside, revealing a secret room.



P. I. Quiz In a corner you find a noose, a switch lock, and a really ugly floor thing. Which one is insignificant?





Secret Room?

I love secret rooms.



Inside, I found the crystal statuette. It was valuable, all right. Why else would Ching put it in a laser cage?

I'd been nosing around Ching's place an awfully long time without getting caught. Luck like that makes me nervous, so I moved quickly, looking for the control to the laser cage. I had a hunch that the

security card I'd found in Ching's safe might provide access.

On the far wall hung what looked like one of those hermetically-sealed

There's the Statuette! Grab It! Ouick! Just kidding. I thought maybe you'd stick your hand through one of those laser beams and melt your arm to a nub. That would have been really funny, man.



chambers. Being an archeology buff, I recognized the objects inside as the three surviving artifacts of the Byzantine Empire. Absolutely priceless. This Ching guy may be a crook, but he sure has good taste in collectibles. On the side of the chamber was a lever, and a sign that read, "Pull This Lever."

For a second, I thought it might reveal the security lock for the laser cage. But this seemed a little too easy, and I noticed that other words on the sign had been obscured by dirt and grime. I grabbed a bandana from a nearby statue of

David (tied around his naughty bits by some fundamentalist type, no doubt) and wiped the sign clean.





Whoa. Good thing I did.

Though I still have a nearly uncontrollable urge to pull the lever anyway.

I don't know. What would you do?



To Pull Or Not to Pull Yeah, that's the damn question, alright. I hate decisions like this.

I went to the wall of paintings. I managed to amuse myself quite awhile, just looking at them. Then I noticed that one of them stuck out from the wall a little more than the others, so I gave it a tug. It slid aside neatly to reveal a security card slot.







Wall of Masters

Do you ever get the feeling that bad guys only buy art to hide stuff behind?





I shoved Ching's card in the slot, and the laser cage shut down. I still couldn't reach the statuette, though. I had to push an empty crate up to the pedestal, then sling the capture noose in to snag the bird.

Hey. All in a day's work.

Looks like Ching needs to install a better security system. The Countess will be glad to get this statuette back — almost as glad as I'll be to take her money . . . and whatever other favors she may care to bestow upon me. I'll return it first thing in the morning.

A Bird in the Hand That statuette is worth \$30,000.





I traveled back to the office, banking my speeder into the smoky San Francisco night and already feeling that thirty grand burning a hole in my pocket.

Office

11:30 PM

I'm one tired hombre. I can't wait to — oh, shoot! I go through all that work to get the statuette out of Ching's place, then I leave it in the damn speeder.

I'm such an idiot.



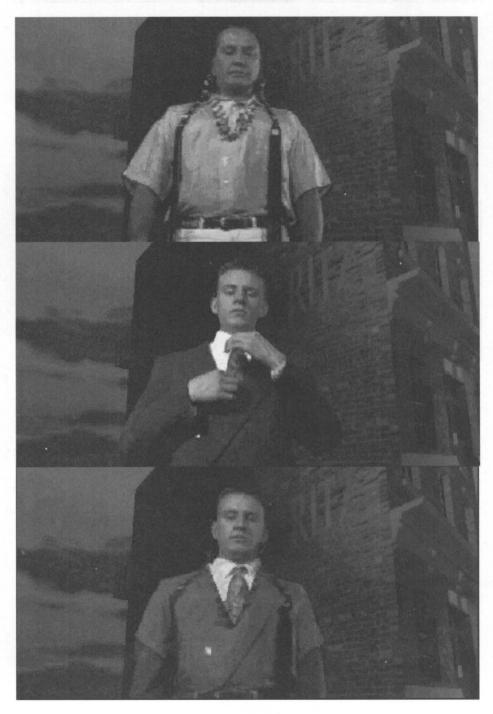














h H Mass

Promoud Shiner

District Control of the Control of t





Part 1







Case Log Transcript: 12-13-42

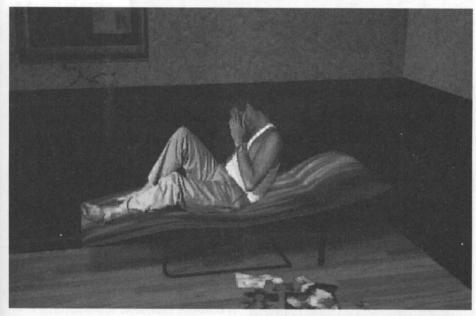
Office

11:15 AM

Oh-h-h . . . my head feels like it's been pounded with a lead pipe.

Wait a minute. It's coming back to me now. It was pounded with a lead pipe. I guess it wasn't a bad dream after all.

I wonder how I got here to my office. All I remember is flying pipe and stars. Damn it! After all the trouble I went to to get that stupid statuette, someone just walks up and takes it like candy from a baby.



Rise and Shiner

OK, yeah, I've been beaten senseless by a man with a lead pipe. But actually, it's pretty much the way I look every morning.

And my wallet's gone too. Great.

I hope somebody on the street saw me get jumped. I've got 29,000 reasons to get that crystal bird back.

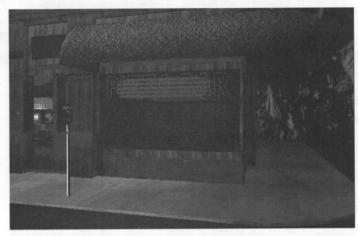
Hopefully I haven't used up my tube of miracle facial cream. It should help reduce the swelling and make me look almost human again.





Hell, it's almost lunchtime. I've been out a long time. I should grab a bite to eat. I'd better go to Slice O' Heaven today — maybe my face will sort of blend in with the pizza, and nobody'll notice.

Slice O' Heaven Spicy pizza, spicy talk.



Slice O'
Heaven
11:45 AM
Francesca
Lucido makes
the spiciest
pizza in the city.
The only thing

spicier than her cooking is her imagination. And right now she seems to have a thing for me. I don't understand it; she's even seen the way I eat. That screens out most women right there.

It started the minute I staggered in the door. "Oh, Tex!" she cried out. "Why can't all men be like you?"

Mama
Lucido
Francesca is
all woman, all
the time. Her
affection for
me is motherly,
in an
incestuous
sort of way.



I was in no mood for our usual pseudo-sexual banter. I said, "You really don't want all men to be cynical alcoholics with large, painful bumps on the head, do you?"

Francesca leaned halfway over the counter. I nearly lept backward. "Oh! You poor dear!" she exclaimed. "They hit you pretty hard, didn't they?"

Hey. How did she know that?

I said, "Oh, it's not too bad. My head's almost stopped bleeding. I just wish I could find out who hit me."





Francesca wanted to mother me in the worst way. "Oh, you poor darling!" she moaned. "Listen, I think I might be able to help you, but I need a favor from you first."

Uh oh, I thought. But fortunately, the "favor" turned out to be nothing like I feared.

"I saw you get jumped last night," whispered Francesca. "Sal told me to keep quiet and that telling you would put my life in danger, but I'm willing to talk if you'll get me some proof that Sal is having an affair. Then I could divorce him and get some of the money he's been hiding away all these years."

I wasn't in any condition for assertive deal-making, so I said, "You

drive a hard bargain, Francesca. But I need a lead on my case, so I'll see what I can dig up on Sal."

"I don't know anything about the girl Sal is seeing," she said. "I've gone through his things but haven't been able to find anything except for

this note." She pulled a torn piece of paper from her apron and waved it at me. "I think it may be a coded message. I'm sorry I don't have anything more for you to work with. Let me know when you've got something."

I grabbed the note and studied it on the way out.

It wasn't a message, really. But Francesca was half-right — it was a code, part of one anyway. It wasn't much, but it was a start. I decided to check in with Louie over at the *Brew & Stew*. He and Sal went back a long way together, and he might know something.



Francesca's Deal
Dig up the

Dig up the dirt on her philandering husband Sal, and she'll give you the lowdown on your lead-pipe mugger.



A partial letter-to-letter code. Great, but it doesn't do much good without something to decode in the first place.





Brew & Stew 12:05 PM

The indescribable aroma of Louie's cow spleen soup hit me like a

King Louie

Here he is!
Poster boy for
National
Orthodontia
Week. He
doesn't know
who whacked
you, but he's
got some
info on Sal.



Chicago linebacker when I entered.

"Ah, what can I getcha?" said Louie amiably.

"Just a couple of questions for you, Louie," I said. First, I asked about the mugging.

"Frannie told me you got whacked," he said. "I haven't heard any word on the street

about who would have done it."

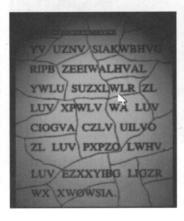
That didn't surprise me. It usually takes a day or two for word to filter in to Louie. Then I got down to the business at hand and asked about Sal.

"As a matter of fact, he just left," he said. "You'd probably be interested to know that he tore up a note . . . and left it in the trash."

Louie added that he just took the garbage and dumped it in the trash can outside the *Brew & Stew*. Oh boy. More of my favorite activity.

Sal's Note

It's from
Regency Escort
Service, which
is interesting
enough. But to
read it, you'll
have to decode
what you can,
then deduce
the rest.



Street 1:00 PM

When I opened the trash can, I found the note pieces scattered right on top. I plucked them out, sat down right there, and started assembling the jigsaw. It didn't take too long, but the note was encoded.

I remembered Francesca's torn piece of note and pulled it out. It was a letter code,





giving me seven of the 26 letters I needed. I started deciphering from there.

Ultimately, it was easier than I'd expected. The decoded note read: "WE HAVE CONFIRMED YOUR APPOINTMENT WITH CHASTITY AT THE SUITE IN THE GOLDEN GATE HOTEL AT THE USUAL TIME. THE PASSWORD TODAY IS SILICON."

Golden Gate Hotel (Lobby) 2:15 PM

The Golden Gate Hotel was once known as the "Waldorf of the Pacific." Finding the Regency Escort Service pleasure suite should be easy enough — if I could get past the front desk clerk. Unfortunately, that would be

Ardo Newpop, the gigantic goon who works there.
Ardo's no rocket scientist — in fact, he probably doesn't even know what a rocket scientist is. But, as Chelsee succinctly puts it, the guy could crush a Suburu with one hand.



Golden
Gate Hotel
If Sal's hanky
is being
pankied here,
I'll have to get
past Ardo
Newpop to find
out about it.

Ardo was

watching some moronic kid show on TV when I walked up.

"Hey, handsome!" I called. "How about some service?"

He lumbered to his feet. I could literally feel his footsteps. I have experience with big guys — they tend to accidently kill their pets, and they can hurt you. Maybe I'd better watch what I say.





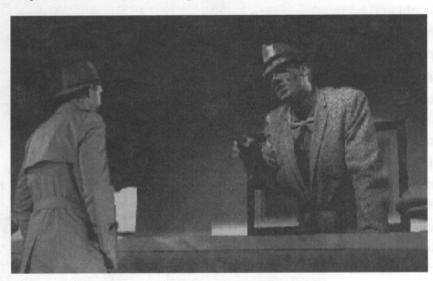
"OK," he said. "I think I already seen this show before, anyway."

"Oh, that's great, Ardo," I said. Knowing his delicate sensibilities, I didn't want to push too far. I got right down to business. "Look, I'm a detective and I've come by to ask you some questions."

"OK," he said, reaching under the counter. "I can answer some questions, but first I have to put on my fire hat because Inspector Burns' Fire Safety show is gonna be on pretty soon." He put a fire helmet on his head.

So now I'm talking to an 8-foot-tall idiot in a plastic hat. I knew he was friendly with Chelsee, so I thought I'd use her as an ice breaker.

Ardo Newpop This guy's genetic mutation has triggered an unfortunate inability to make cognitive distinctions between reality and The Inspector Burns Show. He also happens to be the size of a vending machine.



"Chelsee Bando tells me you're quite an intelligent guy."

He brightened. "Oooh! Chelsee is pretty cool 'cause she has good magazines and stuff. That's where I bought my Inspector Burns Fire Safety Manual."

"Uh huh," I said.

Then I asked him about Sal Lucido.

"I don't know what that is," he said.

Oh boy. I tried inquiring about a few other topics, but — well, it just all comes down to Inspector Burns, doesn't it? Everything.





So I walked out the door . . . then remembered something else I wanted to ask Ardo. But when I went back in, he leaned very hugely over the counter at me and said, "This guy comes up to me and says he don't like you hanging around here. So he gives me a bunch of money and says he'll pay me more if I keep you outta here until he goes away."

I thought about this. "OK," I said.

Geez, I thought. You'd probably have to be Inspector Burns himself to get past this guy.

Whoa! Light bulb.

Yeah, I had the makings of a pretty good Inspector Burns disguise. The only thing I couldn't really simulate was that stones-in-a-vice voice of his. But suddenly, another memory of childhood washed over me.

Rusty's Fun House 2:45 PM

And so I'm back at Rusty's.

In my previous exploration of the Fun House, I noted an entire wall

labeled "Balloon Magic." As I walk in the door, I'll bet my entire fashion trenchcoat collection there's a helium nozzle somewhere on that wall.

Sure enough, there it is — right in the mouth of that Edvard Munch clown face on the wall. Now, I can't carry a tank of helium around town, but I do have a traditional helium container on me.



Munchkin Voice Dispenser See that small nozzle snaking out of the evil clown's mouth? Use your balloon on it.





Golden Gate Hotel (Lobby) 3:10 PM

So I have an Inspector Burns disguise that would fool his own mother. It certainly ought to do the trick on a goofball like Ardo. I took a good, healthy hit of helium from the balloon and strode in.

"It's my hero!" he cried. "Inspector Burns!"

"Hello, Fire Safety Ranger Ardo," I warbled, thinking: *How will I live with myself after this?* Then: "I've come to inspect your fine hotel for fire safety."

It's Inspector Burns!
That's right, kids, in the flesh — or what's left of it, anyway.



"Oh, boy!" said Ardo. "This is a dream come true! Ready for inspection, sir!"

I couldn't search the Regency suite properly with Ardo all over me. I snuck another hit of helium, then tried to display a convincing macho work ethic. Not easy to do when you sound like a Vienna choirboy.

"This can be a dangerous job, Ardo," bleated my Inspector Burns. "I'd better do the inspection solo."

"Oh . . . I understand *completely*," said Ardo. "I better not leave the front desk anyway. I'll just open the doors for you."





Hotel Hallway (Outside Suite) 3:30 PM

After a few minutes, I found the door to the Regency Escort Service hotel suite. It was locked, of course, but there was a security panel on the wall beside it — one that required a password.

But I had the password from Sal's decoded note. I entered it, and the door slid open.

Regency Suite (Main Room) 3:35 PM

So this is the Regency Escort Service "love suite." Now that I'm in, I need to find something to prove that Sal Lucido's been a frequent customer.



Remember the Password? If not, don't

despair. This is a cheat book.

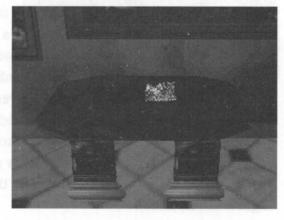
Try SILICON.

Later, Same Room 4:45 PM

The first thing that caught my eye was a shiny, wrinkled sheet of gold foil on the side table. I figured it must be from a bottle of champagne. This

didn't seem like very convincing evidence of any kind, but it was kind of cool, so I slipped it into my pocket.

Next, I moved around the room, manhandling the art. Given my experience in the past couple of days, I've taken to yanking at anything that hangs on a wall. I'll need



Suite Stuff, Part I

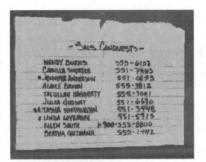
Yeah, I know it's basically a piece of trash. But it was just so . . . sparkly!





Suite Stuff, Part II

The painting may be yellow, but the little list behind it is blue as hell.



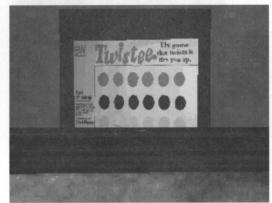
to seek therapy soon. But darned if the habit didn't reveal a few goodies in the suite — including a Twistee Board Game and a very incriminating list entitled "Sal's Conquests."

I may have what I need to nail Sal, but I'll keep looking around, since

nobody's here. I think I'll try that Piano Room next.

Suite Stuff, Part III

"Twistee: The game that twists and ties you up." I used to play this as a kid. I wonder what the escort girls do with it?



Regency Suite Piano Room 5:00 PM

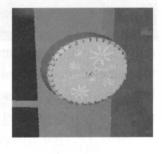
What can I say? The sight of a Larsen Grand Piano was too much. I just had to sit down and . . . violate it.

The Hills Are Comatose

After what I did
on the piano and
to music in
general, I felt
strangely
compelled to steal
a deodorizer and
keep it with me
at all times.



As I played, a smell hit my nose — a familiar smell, a cross between toilet disinfectant and yester-



day's wine spill. I'd know it anywhere — and sure enough, I found a Passion's Breath room deodorizer disk attached to the Tudor window. I plucked it off, took a deep whiff, and nearly passed out. I turned to fling it across the room. But I caught a glimpse of the magnet on the back. And magnets can be handy.





Regency Suite Bedroom 5:10 PM

To a veteran detective, the most interesting thing in your average room is anything that's been made artificially inaccessible. In this case, I noticed that the upper-left drawer of the room's desk was locked. I figured I could open it if I had something to pick it.

While I was there, I tried the unlocked drawers, fully expecting to find nothing of worth to my investigation. There were a few



More Than a Desk

Being an incredibly macho P. I., I find a locked desk drawer to be a direct challenge to my masculinity.

items of interest — especially the camera in the bottom left drawer. No film in it . . . but no dust on it either. Apparently, it's been used recently.

Boy, would I love to see those pictures.

I tried the nightstands and found the latest issue of *Playbub Magazine*. I hated to leave it behind, since this month featured The Girls of the CalTech Mathematics Department. I love a brainy babe with a good set of tautologies. But I couldn't manage to peel the magazine off the nightstand.



Sticky, But No Film This freshlyused camera must've seen some torrid action. Unfortunately,







Nightstand

OK, maybe it's not literature.
But it's damn fine photo journalism.
How else would we know about these things?



All in all, not much visible dirt on Sal in here. But that locked desk drawer is suspicious, very suspicious. I need a piece of wire or something to pick that lock.

Before leaving, I checked the closet, of course. It was mostly empty — what remained

was scanty evidence, so to speak. I grabbed the champagne glass, thinking — well, frankly, I don't know *what* I was thinking. I guess I figured it's a damn nice glass.

Quick P. I. Quiz: Which Item Do You Take From The Closet? Wrong!



Regency Suite Jacuzzi Room 5:20 PM

As I stood in the doorway, the first thing I noticed was a pair of shorts in the hot tub. Hey, Sal's or no, they stay *right* where they are. But then I caught something out of the corner of my eye — someone had

dropped a champagne cork in the mounted vase to my left.

The wire mesh cover was still wrapped around it. *Wire*, I thought.

Unfortunately, the mouth was too narrow to get my hand in, and the vase was obviously saranite — that new unbreakable plastic.

Cork
Man, I love
this stuff.
Somebody
ought to name
a county
after it or
something.







Suddenly, the little Mr. Science Guy in my head began to hammer me with a Socratic fury:

Doesn't cork float?

Am I near a ready source of liquid?

Do I have a receptacle capable of transporting liquid?

Are rhetorical self-interrogations really necessary, you idiot?

After filling the vase, I examined the cork. Yep. Wire alright. I plucked it off, untwisted it, and headed back to the bedroom.



Hey, Wake
Up, I'm
Almost Done!
Sure, it's
tedious,
mind-numbing
busywork. But
you got a cork
out of the deal,
didn't you?

Regency Suite Bedroom 5:25 PM

Man, what a find!

Professional that I am, it took all of twelve seconds to pick the desk lock. Inside — yes, *the shoelace*. My hand trembled as I raised the priceless treasure to my eyes. It's . . . it's all so *clear* to me now.

Case closed.

It is the culmination of my career.

I can retire in peace now.

Golden Gate Hotel Jacuzzi Room 5:30 PM

OK, so I took the shoelace anyway.

It seemed the bedroom was a big dead end, all the way around. So I headed back to the hot tub for one last look at things.

A few items lay flung about. Somebody had tossed a beer-drenched towel on the floor. I gave it a listless kick; it lay over a drain. I was about to walk past when I saw something under the grate.





Grating
Find
Hey. If I had
that
screwdriver,
I could open
the drain
cover and get
that
screwdriver.
Too bad I
don't have
that
screwdriver.



A screwdriver and a roll of film. Of the two, the film is clearly the more intriguing. But on the other hand, the screwdriver would let me open the damn drain cover in the first place.

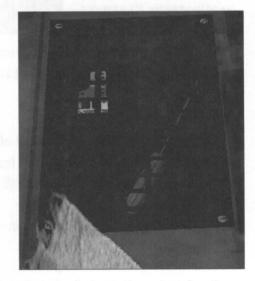
OK, man, sometimes I amaze even myself. I'm standing there, staring, and suddenly I think, Hey, I've played enough computer adventure games to know that

you get objects out of drains with magnets. See? Once again, even the most

seemingly infantile pastimes can prove to be invaluable training for the prospective P. I.

So I tied the stupid shoelace to the Passion's Breath deodorizer magnet, slipped it through the grate. The film isn't metal, of course, but the screwdriver clamped aboard my device and I hauled it up. I unscrewed the grate and grabbed the film.

I can't trust this film to a film developer — particularly if it con-



tains the naughty pictures that I fervently hope it does. I need to develop these myself. Gee . . . where can I find a good, overpriced electronic developing kit?

Electronics Shop 6:05 PM

I wish I could give everyone I've ever loved a credit card. I cannot express the pleasure it gives me to use one. Under the benificent gaze of





Hamm, I scored myself another Blue Light Special — a PhotoMatic Profilm developing kit.

I was so excited, I just couldn't wait. So I developed the film right there in the Electronics Shop. Whoa!



Blue Light Special Again Get the photo developing kit this time.

Slice O' Heaven 6:30 PM

At first, I was actually

reluctant to hand the incriminating photos of Sal over to Francesca. Wow. What if she had a wild fit, or broke down in hysterical tears? What if, as the lone representative of my gender, she decided to focus her rage on me? What if she cut off my pizza tab?

My fears proved baseless. If anything, she seemed happier and more flirtacious than ever.

"Well, gorgeous, you're back!" she gushed. "Did you get the evidence I need?"



I was in no position to play games.

"I think I might," I said. "Let me look inside my overcoat."

I dug out the pack of photos and handed them over.

"Oh, excellent!" she screeched. "This will do the job nicely. I'll answer *all* your questions now."

I quickly asked Francesca what she knew about the mugging. It was like turning on a faucet.



Francesca and the Slimeball

With photos like this one, Francesca should be able to handle Sal's slick lawyers with one hand tied behind her back. Gosh, I'm so proud of my work.



"I was up late, having some espresso, then I saw you get jumped," she gushed. "The guy who hit you was real small, maybe 5'6", 130 pounds, I didn't see his face. He took your package you were carrying, then ran off. It looked like a professional hit, but he wasn't trying to kill you. Believe me, if he wanted to, he could have."

Being Sicilian, Francesca no doubt knows what a professional hit looks like. But if the crystal bird is as valuable as it seems to be, why *didn't* the attacker just eliminate me?

She continued her story: "After the first guy took off, I saw another guy come running down from your office. He bent over you and went through your coat, then he ran off, too. I recognized the second guy. He was a mutant named Pug. In fact, I remember seeing him hanging around your office for the past few days. Anyway, I went over to be sure you were OK."

I nodded my thanks. "Sal showed up a few minutes later and I made him carry you up to your office," she added. "That's all I know."

Pug? Again, never heard of him. Man, I've been out of circulation too long. I'd better head over to Coit Tower. Beek probably has the best information on mutant suspects in this part of town.

Coit Tower 6:50 PM

Beek was overjoyed to see me. "Hi ya, Murphy!" he snorted. "Wait'll you see my new nose! I'm so excited! I'm gonna look and feel like a new man!"

"Well, that's swell, Beek," I said. "I hope you're feeling grateful enough to answer some more questions."

"Yeah, sure," said Beek. I think he was smiling, though tusks tend to give that effect. "Anything."

"What do you know about a mutant named Pug?" I asked.

"Ahh, Pug and I used to hang out sometimes," he said. "But I haven't seen him for awhile. I heard he's gotten a job of some kind. He





doesn't work very often and usually sleeps in a box down by the Snow White Warehouse."

"Thanks, Beek," I said, and took off.

Pug's Alley 7:45 PM

Following Beek's instructions, I hung around the warehouse. Not long after, a gust of wind carried a horrible stench into my nasal passages. I turned to see a shadowy figure waddle into the alley.

Pug was an obsequious weasel of the first magnitude. I swear I could almost *hear* him sweat. And the lingering pain in my head was heightening the malice I was beginning to feel towards this maggot.

"The way you look at me," he said. "It makes me nervous."

"It should," I said, smiling.
"When I'm done with you, you'll find breathing more painful than you ever imagined."

He held up his hands. "I think you should think twice about threatening me."

"I think you should talk to me while you've still got teeth," I said



Pug He's even more disgusting than his name.

calmly. "And talk faster — I can't take the sound of your voice much longer."

"The way you threaten me has caused me to wet myself," he simpered. "Why are you treating me like I'm some kind of criminal?"

"I don't know," I said in a reasonable tone. "Cause you are one?"

"You are a cynical person, if you'll forgive my saying so."

I sighed. "OK, I forgive you," I said. "Now would you please just hand over my wallet?"





He dug it quickly out of a vest pocket. "Here it is," he said happily. If he'd had a tail, it would've been wagging. "You will see I have spent very little of your money." He handed it over. "Tell me," he added, "how did you find me?"

Pug Hands
Over the
Goods
Given his
obvious
problems, I
should
probably drop
the wallet in a
specimen bag.



"Well, you're pretty sneaky," I said. "But someone saw you rob me. They also said you were tailing me."

"I was hired to follow you," he said, almost proudly. "I provide people with information, through ways of my own." He laughed a slimy little laugh.

"People actually hire you?" I

said. "Who's the sap that had you following me?"

"I was hired by an old P. I. who called himself the Colonel," said Pug. "He paid me to follow you and report back on everyone I saw you talk to."

The Colonel? What the hell?

Pug rambled on. "He also wanted me to tell him if I saw you with a little statue of a bird. He told me very little else, though he said that he had to find out if you could be trusted." Pug heaved a huge sigh and threw out his hands. "There! I have told you everything I know. Now let me go and I shall not bother you again."

Yeah, I let him go. And something gives me the feeling that he's right ... he won't bother me again. Anyway, I've got me a little *bone* to pick with the Colonel. So he wants to know if I can be trusted? Maybe he should be wondering if I can be feared.

For the record, I should note that the Colonel was my mentor in the detective biz. When I was a young, idealistic crime-fighter, I didn't understand some of the Colonel's unethical P. I. methods. I reported the Colonel to the P. I. Licensing Board and his license was temporarily





revoked. In the years since, I've come to understand and even occasionally use the Colonel's "questionable" methods, but we've never made up.

When he walked back into my life the other night, and I saw his reflection in the window — well, it got my hopes up, I'll admit it. But then he hit me with that warning . . . and now this.

Putting a tail like Pug on me. It's insulting, to say the least.

Speeder

11:15 PM

I haven't seen the Colonel's office since we fell out fifteen years ago. From the look of the exterior, he's kept it up pretty nicely.

I knocked on the door and it swung open. The place was trashed. I stepped warily through the doorway. The Colonel lay slumped over his desk.

I rushed over to him, pulled him up. Somebody had rammed a six-inch dagger through his breastbone. It was bad. I figured him a goner. But to my surprise, he groaned and roused to consciousness.

He gave me a look. "I guess I'm gonna have to put off that trip to the Caribbean." He hacked out a cough, adding: "Maybe permanently."



Colonel's Office Too late. The Chameleon got here first.

I could barely think. The Colonel, in my mind, was invincible. "My God!" I said. "What happened? Who did this to you?"

"The Chameleon," he muttered. "He's some kind of shape-shifter. I swear he's the devil himself."

"What did he want?" I babbled. "Why did he attack you?"

"Ah, he thought I had it," said the Colonel. Considering what was jutting from his chest, he was showing remarkable spunk. "When he found out I didn't, he tried to torture me into telling him where it was. He





got impatient and stuck a knife in my chest. I must've passed out." He winced. "I didn't get enough sleep last night."

The Colonel's endurance here was making me think about the "lifestyle changes" he'd made eight years ago. Maybe I'd better give them a try. Geez, when they talk about lowering your saturated fat intake,

Soliloquy
of the
Week
Gee, that's a
nasty looking
little nick you
got there,
Colonel.



they never mention the knife wound survivability thing.

"What did they want?"

"The Winter Chip," he said. I swear, he was getting perkier by the second. "The cult wants it. They're planning a doomsday party, but they're afraid that whoever's got the chip might

stop them. You're gonna have to find it and get it to CAPRICORN. They know what to do with it." He moaned a bit, and glanced down at the knife.

"But I don't know where to look," I said. "You've got to give me some help." I almost said, *Hurry, before you die gurgling in your own blood*, but a thin veneer of propriety stopped me at the last second.

"No time," he gasped. "There's a disk by the bookcase. It's got information on the Winter Chip." He was in pain now. His eyes rose to mine. "Don't fail me, Tex. I hope to God you've learned something after all these years. . . ."

I flew the Colonel to emergency and the attendants rushed him into surgery, but wouldn't tell me what his chances were. I know I should go back and search the Colonel's office for the disk he mentioned, but the cops'll probably have the place cordoned off for awhile — and anyway, I'm dead tired. I'd better go back to the office for couple hours of shut-eye.

Office

12:30 AM

As I opened the door of my office, I caught a whiff of expensive perfume. I





barely had time to mutter "Uh oh" before I felt my jaw slam into a brick wall.

When my vision cleared, I found myself seated across from a beautiful Asian woman. Matching goons with tommie guns stood on either side of me.

"Good evening, Mr. Murphy," she said graciously. "Please, have a seat."

I ignored the fact that I was already seated. "Gee, thanks," I said. "My dogs are really tired."

"Yes, you've been very busy, haven't you?" said the woman. "Let me introduce myself. My name is Eddie Ching."

I almost laughed. "Gimme a break," I said. "Eddie Ching is a guy, and I'm fairly sure you're a girl."

I got a nice shot to the jaw from the goon on my left.

"I've found it useful for people to think Eddie Ching is a man, but that's no concern of yours," said Ching with a grim smile. "I have learned that you were hired to steal a statuette from my apartment. I admire the



Meet Eddie Ching He's pretty tough, for a dame.

skill you displayed in doing so but I must now ask you to return the bird to me."

"Thanks for the compliment, but I don't have your stupid bird," I said. "Someone stole it from me after I left your place. You'll just have to run down to Goodwill and get yourself a new one."

"It's gone?" cried Ching. "You imbecile! Have you no idea what you've done? You were set up! The person who hired you belongs to a group so powerful they may hold the fate of the world in their hands! The statuette is worthless except to this cult and I went to great lengths to keep it from them. And all it took was one idiotic P. I. to give these fanatics the talisman they need to loose the demons of hell upon the earth!"



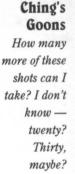


"OK, I made a mistake," I said. "You won't help things by calling me names."

For my impertinence, I received another shot from the left goon. And for good measure, the right goon took a shot, too. I can't say it was pleasant.

Ching was livid. "You obviously don't understand what I'm saying," she hissed. "With the statuette, the cult will fulfill its prophecies, unleashing an unimaginable flood of destruction! The prophecy is supposed to be fulfilled in six days. If the statuette is not recovered before then, nothing will matter — we'll all be dead!"

"You mean to tell me that the world is gonna end on Thursday?" I said. "Damn it! I don't get my unemployment check till Friday!"





"The cult knows about me," she said, ignoring my attitude now. "They tried several times to steal the statuette once they learned I had it. They will not allow me or my operatives to obstruct their plans. You, however, they do not consider to be a threat."

Not a threat, I thought. OK. Beat me all you want, Ching. But that hurts my pride.

She continued: "The cult is

behind the Crusade for Genetic Purity. I don't know anymore than what I've told you except for the identity of the man who set you up. He is known as the Chameleon. If you can find him, you will be within reach of the statuette."

Ching grew quiet. Then she said, "You should realize that your blunder makes you reponsible for ten billion lives. Hope for your own sake that you can succeed where more powerful people cannot." A look of





pure malice came over her face. Any doubts I had about her capabilities vanished with that look. "Let this be a reminder to you not to repeat your mistakes. If you fail, I will see you in hell."

And then her goons applied an ugly little memory tattoo on my face \dots with their fists.

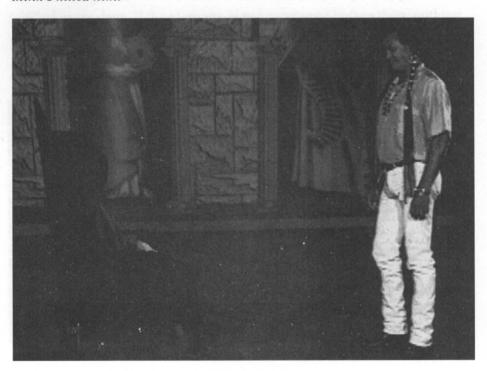




Epilogue: Day 3

"So, did he have the chip or not?"

"I never found out. My usual methods of persuasion weren't working so I had to get a little more forceful. Next thing I know, his lights go out. I think I killed him."



"Dead men don't help us! We've got to find out about that chip! If the Colonel didn't have the chip, then he probably sent it to Murphy. Stick around and keep tabs on him until the last second — but don't kill him! If the chip doesn't show up, make sure Murphy doesn't blunder into our path. If you find the chip, destroy it! Then you can do what you want with Murphy."



naq

The second secon





Part]







Case Log Transcript: 12-14-42

Office 9:10 AM

Maybe I need a career change. Two days in a row waking up in a semiconscious stupor is enough for anybody. My nose is so sore my eyes water when I inhale, and all my front teeth shift slightly when I exhale. On top of all this I found out the world population may be annihilated because of me.

That's just too much guilt to heap on a guy at this hour of the morning.

Looks like I'm on my own. I'll need to find that disk the Colonel referred to. And what about that Countess? Is she on the level or is she just feeding me a line?

Yeah, it's about time to visit
Her Highness again. Even if she
is telling the truth, my \$30,000
finder's fee is starting to look a little paltry.



Rise and Shiner: The Sequel Another day, another pounding. At this rate, I should be able to peel my face from my skull in a couple of weeks. What a cool party trick that would be.

Alleged Mansion of Countess Renier 10:00 AM

OK, there's something wrong with this picture.

When I was here before, the place looked like a palace. Now it looks like the aftermath of on IRS auction. Somebody wanted me to





believe the person I talked to was a real countess. Now I can see I've been

Mansion Return Wow. I bet the Countess didn't get her cleaning deposit back.



played for a sucker. But who set me up? And why?

I started to sift through the remains of what once was a really swell sitting room. A bloodcurdling screech put me right down on the floor. I looked up at the chandelier, where a

bald eagle glared down at me. Man, now that the animal rights lobby is huge, those things are everywhere. They're worse than pigeons.

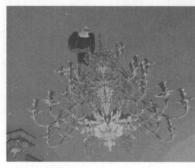
Hmmm. The front door was open when I got here. The eagle must've flown in. I stood and took a closer look. The bird had a bright, metallic cigarette case clutched in its talons. I wanted that case — it was the only interesting thing I could see in my scan of the room.

I know that eagles are attracted to shiny objects. So I wondered if I could somehow engineer a trade. Digging through my pockets, I found

just the thing.

Welcome to the Hotel California

Get it? Eagles?
OK, OK, forget it.
Just use
something shiny
on that pesky bird
so he'll trade you
for his
cigarette case.



The bird was more than happy to make the trade.
When it dropped the



case, I examined it. There was only one cigarette left inside. I thought maybe I'd keep it around for a smoking emergency.



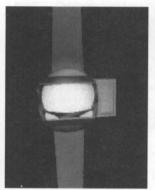


Next, I moved to the fireplace, where I found a watch left behind on the mantle. A closer look revealed a neat little secret compartment — the kind P. I. types just love to hide teeny things in.

Any thorough investigation includes times where you get to rip stuff apart, looking for other stuff that might be hidden under the top stuff. As you can imagine, this



Watch Out! There's a timely discovery to be made on the fireplace mantle.



part of the job can be quite satisfying. I started kicking aside junk, and under an obituary section of yesterday's *Standard Examiner* I found an ashtray.

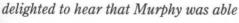
It was full of expensive imported cigarette butts — the same type of fancy cigarette, I noted, that I'd found in the case.

Finally, I found scraps of a very interesting note in the corner wastebasket. I pieced them together pretty easily; the assembled note is just a fragment of a longer note. I'll read what I was able to salvage:

... circumstances— ... s are progressing smoothly ...



Ashtray Under Obits Old cigarette butts are disgusting, but often provide good clues.







Note This, Please Pluck the scraps from the wastebasket and put them together.



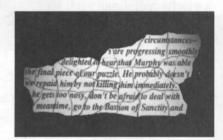
... the final piece of our puzzle. He probably doesn't ... we repaid him by not killing him immediately.... he gets too nosy, don't be afraid to deal with ... meantime, go to the Bastion of Sanctity and

Like I said, parts of the note were missing, but what's left tells

me plenty. I don't need to glue this together, I've got all the info I need.It's obvious I'm in the middle of a big game, all right — but I'm playing

against opponents I don't even know vet.

Whoever these guys are, they're playing for keeps. Time to find that disk the Colonel hid in his office. Knowing how thorough he is, my guess is that the disk will give me all the deep background I'll need.



Colonel's Office 11:15 AM

When I got to the Colonel's office, the police were just leaving. They told me they'd combed the place and came up empty. I'm not surprised.

As I stepped inside, I tried to remember what the Colonel told me—something about a "Winter Chip" and an "Emergency Disk" hidden somewhere in the display case. I hoped that the info on the disk would tell me something about this Chameleon fellow who stuck the Colonel.

I went over to the bookcase and started nosing around. It didn't take long to find the disk. I was surprised that neither the Chameleon nor the cops had found it. But then, nobody's as good as me, I guess.





The Colonel's computer was a real racehorse. I booted up the document on the disk. As I read, I could feel the old ulcer working up. Ching, the Colonel, they were right — this is doomsday stuff, apocalypse now, and I mean *now*.

The last line of the document said there's additional information in the Colonel's



P. I. Rule
#4,899
Whenever you
find something
round on the
back of a vase,
you should stick
it in a
computer.

safe, which was easy enough to find. Unfortunately, it's a top of the line security safe and I'll need the combination to open it. Where would the old man stash it?

I started to scour the room for something that might indicate the

safe's combination, or where I could find it. On a table by the window I found a picture frame laying face-down. *Odd*, I thought. It didn't appear to have been tossed there, or knocked roughly over. It was as if someone had placed it *gently* in that position.

The Colonel?
That old dog, I thought.
This is a *message*.



Safe Hiding Place
Wow, what an original place to hide a safe!
Now, if I can just come up with the combination....

I quickly flipped up a picture of a *very* nice-looking dame. I figured this must be the Colonel's squeeze. It was clear to me now — if I could track her down, she could probably give me more information, including perhaps the combination to that safe.





Mystery
Dame
Special to
the Colonel,
obviously.
But who is
she? Where
is she?



After that, it was just a matter of fundamental investigative work. I went right to the Colonel's desk. I found an envelope that my P. I. instincts and keen sense of smell told me was sent by a woman. The return address listed the sender as one Melahn Tode.

In another drawer I found a sappy little greeting card from the Colonel to someone he

planned to escort to "the tropics" after his current case. It looked ready to mail. And unless I missed my guess, it was destined for the good Miss (or Mrs.) Tode. Time to play Mr. Mailman.

Stationery Clues

The envelope gives me the address I need. The greeting card doubles as a calling card, in case Melahn Tode doubts my relationship to the Colonel.





Melahn Tode's 12:30 PM

Well, Melahn turns out to be quite a comely young lass. Young enough, in fact, to be the Colonel's granddaughter. Her immediate appearance suggested that perhaps I'd interrupted her in the act of . . . uh, doing something. Dressing, maybe. Yeah, dressing. That's it.

"Who are you?" she asked. "And what do you want?"





Something told me she could be friendly, given the right approach. I decided against being too pushy, and opted for raw honesty.

"My name's Tex," I said. "Will you marry me?"

She giggled. "Well, that's very sweet, but I'm, like, seeing some-



What a
Tode!
If there were
two of her,
they'd be the
most incredible
pair of Melahns
you've ever seen
in your life.

one? And he's gonna be here soon, so if you'll excuse me—"

"I'm not looking for a date, sweetheart," I said. "I'm here to let you know that your boyfriend won't be coming by tonight . . . maybe ever. Someone tried to murder the Colonel. I don't know if he's gonna make it. He may be dead now for all I know."

Her face registered pure horror. Poor gal, I thought. "The *Colonel?*" she cried out. "*Dead?* I can't believe it!" Just as I was about to offer my deepest sympathy, she rolled her eyes in irritation and added: "I guess we won't be going to *Bermuda* next week."

I winced. "I can tell you're pretty broken up about your sugar daddy," I said. "But would you mind trying to answer a few simple questions?"

Her faced closed up defensively. "Hold on a second," she said. "How do I know that you didn't, like, kill the Colonel?"

"Well he's not dead *yet*," I said sharply. "Anyway, I have something for you from the Colonel."

She brightened a bit. "OK, let's see it," she said.

Look, I have deep feminist sensibilities. But I'd be far less than honest if I suggested that this girl was anything but a shamelessly parasitic bubblehead. There — I said it, and I feel better.





Anyway, I handed her the greeting card. She practically tore it from my hands and opened it greedily. "There wasn't any *money* in it?" she whined. She regained a bit of composure and added, "OK, I guess I can answer a few questions."

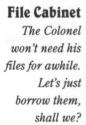
"Please," I said. "Tell me about your relationship with the Colonel."

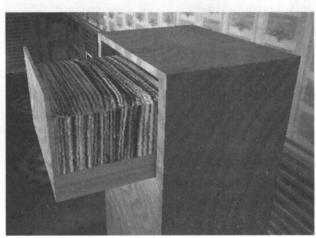
There was no hesitation. "Well, he was nice to me so I was nice to him," she said. "I mean, it was fun. I feel kind of bad now, though, because he gave me this package that I wasn't supposed to open unless something happened to him, but I opened it anyway and I was so disappointed because there was nothing in it except for this stupid key." She stared at me, stunned by this oversight on the Colonel's part. "No money, no jewels, no *nothing*."

"Wait a minute," I said. "The Colonel gave you a key? Can I have it?" "Sure, I guess you can take it," she said. "I don't even know where I'd use it."

Yeah, I wouldn't touch that line with a ten-foot pole, so I bid her a swift adieu and headed back to the Colonel's office, key in hand.

Colonel's Office





1:05 PM

The key looked to be of the file cabinet variety, and I was right. In the top drawer I found a set of coded documents. I had a hunch now about what I might find in the safe — a decoding manual, no doubt.



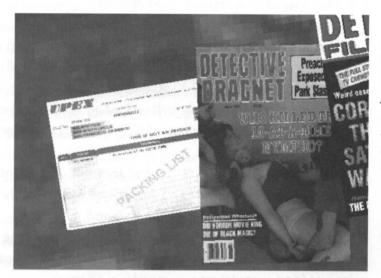


I glanced down at the floor and saw that the recently delivered mail. The latest issues of *Detective Dragnet*, *Detective Files*, *Unofficial Detective* — yeah, the Colonel and I always did share the same literary tastes. Under the mags I found a UPEX return receipt.

Apparently, the Colonel sent something recently. I took a closer look.

Guess who he sent it to?

I hopped in the speeder and headed back for another word with Ms. Tode.



UPEX Receipt Under all that fine, fine literature is

interature is something actually worth examining.

Melahn Tode's 1:35 PM

I expected to see an annoyed Tode, but that's not what answered the door. "Back again?" she said. "You know, I've been thinking. Umm, I think we could, like, be friends? You know, I think you should stick around and talk to me for awhile 'cause, umm, I don't want to be lonely?"

It was pathetic, in an amusing sort of way. I said, "Normally, I'd pay good money to be friends with you, but right now I just need to ask you something."

"OK," she said. "But remember me the next time you've got something burning a hole in your pocket." As if I didn't know what she meant, she added: "Cash, I mean."





I asked her about the UPEX shipping receipt. Again, she was remarkably forthcoming. With information, that is.

"Oh, yeah," she said, wrinkling her cute, greedy little nose. "I got another dumb letter from the Colonel. There were some, like, numbers and stuff written on a piece of paper inside?"

I thought, The security safe combination!

"You can have it," she added. "I can't even understand what it is." She disappeared for a few seconds, then returned and handed me a piece of paper with the numbers "5-7-1" printed largely on it.

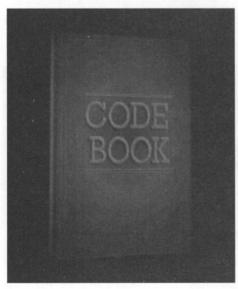
Just on a lark — a big, big lark — I asked her if she'd ever heard the Colonel talk about someone named Chameleon. I was shocked to learn he had.

"Chameleon?" she said. "Oh, I feel so *stupid*. The Colonel mentioned that name a couple of times but I thought he was saying he was getting close to getting his hands on, like, a *million*."

I tried to imagine spending an extended period of time with Melahn in a place like Bermuda. I came to the conclusion that the sound of her voice would trigger violent spasms within 48 hours.



This handy
little thing,
combined
with the
Colonel's
coded files,
finally unveils
the true extent
of this case.



Colonel's Office 2:15 PM

I entered the combination in the safe, opened the door, and sure enough, found a code book inside. By applying the book's codes to the Colonel's coded files, I soon found myself with a stack of decoded documents.

They were the Colonel's notes on his current case. As I





read them, I began to wish I'd never seen the damn things. For the case record, let me read them into the log:

- 11/4 My client is Paul DuBois, a genetic scientist working on a topsecret project for G.R.S. I've uncovered information that proves that the project at G.R.S. is being funded by the Crusade for Genetic Purity.
- 11/8 Paul believes that a secret cult is at work in G.R.S., conducting bizarre experiments that could give them a new and unstoppable destructive force. He was unable or unwilling to give me specific details. Why would a genetic research center be developing a weapon?
- 11/19 Paul gave me a list of employees that have left the corporation recently. I went through the list and was able to locate only one person: Alaynah Moore, who I found via a credit card trace. She is currently checked into the Roadside Motel. She says her life is in danger but she can't tell me why. Something's happening at G.R.S. that's important enough to kill for. What is it?
- 11/23 With the information from Paul and Alaynah, I contacted CAPRICORN and found out they already have an agent (Eva Schanzee) working undercover at G.R.S.
- 11/29 I made the delivery from CAPRICORN to Eva Schanzee. God help us if her cover gets blown.
- 12/6 Paul contacted me and said he had enough information on the cult to blow it open. He said he had details on the project, the cult and its objectives, and also how the Moon Child





figures in. We agreed on a meeting place where Paul would give the details. He never showed up.

- 12/7 Both Paul and Eva Schanzee have vanished without a trace. I've tried to follow their trail, but I've been constantly blocked by a dangerous character known as the Chameleon. My official contacts at INTERPOL have told me that he's a master of disguise. My unofficial contacts tell me that he's a Native American a shaman. It's rumored that he possesses the ancient power of shape-shifting the ability to appear in different forms. If this is true, he could be anyone. I'm not sure who I can trust now. And if the Chameleon's working for the cult, it must be headed by someone very powerful.
- 12/8 G.R.S. has been disbanded. Is the project finished? Am I too late?
- 12/10 There are eyes in the shadows, following my every move. A voice in my head is telling me to hurry, before someone stops me. But now I've lost my contacts at CAPRICORN, and I haven't found any answers. I need to find a way into G.R.S.!

This is incredible. Whatever's happening is happening fast and on a big, big scale. Looks like I need to pick up where the Colonel left off. It's pretty ironic — me, trying to fill his shoes again after fifteen years.

Roadside Motel 4:30 PM

I couldn't believe it when the name Alaynah Moore appeared in the Colonel's decoded files.





I used to date her sister a few years back. Then, Alaynah was an annoying 12-year-old who'd had a knack for entering rooms at the wrong time. It was obvious she still recognized me when she opened the motel room door. She'd grown up. Quite a bit. I told her right off about the Colonel, and explained that I was on the case now.

"So you're little
Ally Moore, huh?"
I said, shaking my
head. "The last
time I saw you,
you were quite a
pest. And you'd
just gotten your
braces put
on, right?"

"Yeah, but that was quite a while ago, Tex, and I've grown up," she said. Second that



Little Ally Moore Wow. She grew up. Now what?

motion, I thought. "You know, I used to have quite a crush on you."

"Yeah, I remember," I said. "Speaking of crushed, how's your sister? I haven't seen her since our nasty little breakup."

"She got married a few years ago," said Alaynah. "In fact, it was Debbie's husband who helped me get hired at G.R.S. It's been just over a year. Since then I've worked as Marcus Tucker's personal secretary. He's the director of G.R.S."

I scratched my head at the notion of Debbie married to some poor dupe. "So what does G.R.S. do, specifically?"

"They do genetic research," said Alaynah. "Gene mutations, genetic viruses, that sort of thing. It was very professional — high-tech. G.R.S.





hired only the best young scientists. But from the beginning, everything seemed really mysterious and secretive."

"Is that why you quit?"

She didn't answer at first. She got up, rubbing her arms like she was cold, and went to the window. Her face was tense, troubled. I felt bad for the kid.

"I didn't leave until I started receiving the threatening notes," she said. "At first I didn't take them seriously, but they kept coming. I decided to get away and use my vacation time, but when I got back, someone had gone through my apartment. That's when I checked into this motel."

"How did the Colonel find you?"

"I don't know," she said. "He just appeared here one day. It took him awhile to convince me that I could trust him, but now, for all I know, he's dead. I'm scared, Tex. Really scared."

"Look," I said. "I'll do what I can to help you, but I need to know everything. Why do you think someone at G.R.S. wants you out of the way?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "Since I was Mr. Tucker's assistant for a couple years, I had access to most of his files. Maybe someone thinks I saw something I shouldn't have."

She came back and plopped down on the bed again. An innocent kid, caught in a web. It made me kind of angry, to tell you the truth.

I said, "Well, since you don't work at G.R.S. anymore — why do you



But Is There a Plan B?

It's pretty clear that my next move is to G.R.S. headquarters with the help of that passcard she's giving me. think your life's in danger?"

"The last day I came to work, I got a note that said my life was in immediate danger," she said. "When I saw that someone had broken into my apartment, I knew that I wouldn't be safe anywhere."





I knew what I had to do. "Sounds like my next move ought to be to G.R.S.," I said. "Can you help me get in?"

"Yes!" she said. "I still have a passkey to the main doors. You can take it, but please be careful. G.R.S. has a 24-hour security watch. With the Colonel gone, I have no one to turn to. I don't know if I should, but I'm going to trust you."

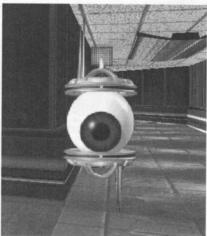
She handed me the passkey, and I told her to sit tight and wait for me to get back. I also warned her to keep the door locked and don't open it for anyone except me. Alanah obviously doesn't know anything more than what she's told me. She gave me the break I needed, though. Like the Colonel, I have a feeling that G.R.S. will provide a few answers.

G. R. S. — Research & Development Office 9:00 PM

I waited until well after dark to make my next move. The G.R.S. office complex is located in the heart of new San Francisco. Alaynah's passkey got me into the lobby, which was empty. A directory showed Marcus Tucker's office on the fourth subterranean level. I took the elevator down. Before the doors opened, I heard a warning:

"Attention! Lethal Security Probe On Premises!"

Then the doors opened. And there it was — a "security eye" probe, floating at the far end of the hall. My line of work keeps me pretty familiar with the security business. If one of these nasty probes catch you — well, it isn't pretty. So I turned and sprinted down the left corridor.



The Evil
Eye
Since this
guy's
programmed
to eviscerate
you, it's
probably best
to keep one
step ahead
of him.





I was moving so fast I overran the first door, so I hopped in the second: "Research & Development." That's where I am now. I started to nose around when, a couple of minutes ago, I heard a security announcement:

"Warning! Security sweep will begin in five seconds."

I found a cozy little hiding spot in the back corner of the office, next to the desk of Paul DuBois — the Colonel's client. After the probe left, I got back to work. I found a hex wrench on the floor, and grabbed it. But about

Safe Corner
Once you find
the R & D office,
enter and duck
low into that
corner next to
Paul DuBois'
desk during each
security sweep.



9:10 PM

Look, I'm a sports guy, and I make no apologies for that. So the first thing I notice is the really cool San Francisco Stars pennant hanging across the room. I'm looking at it, I'm thinking, Hey, G.R.S. is closed down. Nobody comes here anymore. So I grab the thing.

Something was stuck to the back. I flipped it around and found a computer access card. Inscribed on it: "Paul DuBois." By pure luck, I'd hit the jackpot.

two minutes later, another security sweep forced me back into the corner. Damn probe makes its rounds quickly. Fortunately, it's pretty blind, as probes go.

Well, the eye just left, so I have to move fast. I'll make another log entry if I find anything else in here.

G.R.S. Research & Development Office

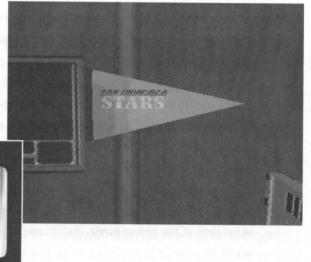






As I headed back to Paul DuBois' desk for some computer invasion, I caught sight of a cute little TV sitting abandoned on a nearby desk. Using my pennant logic again, I lifted it. A closer look revealed that it has no

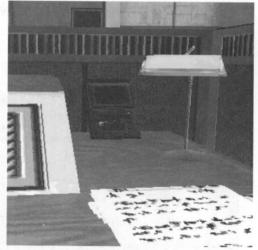
reception capability. It's set up to run only when hooked to a laserdisc player.



Pennant Winner Hey, look at the back of that flag! Now I can cheer for the Stars and snoop in Paul's computer, too.

R&D Room (Paul DuBois Area) 9:20 PM

That pesky security probe is getting on my nerves. I've had to dive into my corner several times now. Paul's computer, by the way, was easy to access with his card. I got lots of inside info on the suspicious activities here at G.R.S. In fact, I found the per-



TV...Not!
This thing
only works
with a
laserdisc
player. Ah
well. I guess
half a loaf is
better than
none.

sonal file that DuBois had planned to deliver to the Colonel when he disappeared.





I'm at the terminal now. I've dumped the entire file onto a disk, but I want to read a few excerpts into the case log as well:

THE G.R.S. PROJECT

... My part in the project has been to develop a specific artificial viral strain, which I've been told will be used in treating respiratory ailments, such as bronchitis and asthma.

At one time, there were at least thirty people working on the project. Now we're down to eight. I tried to contact some of the employees that left, but couldn't. Today, I found out what happened to them. Some of them were considered to be "genetically suitable" and have been sent to the Moon Child. The rest are dead.

I accidently found a recording made of an experiment, and the test subject was one of my former co-workers. I only saw a few moments of the experiment, but it was horrible. I am sure that experiment involved the use of an airborne virus that was inhaled. It caused a violent death almost instantly. It's horrifying to think that my research had probably contributed to the virus that was being tested.

THE MOON CHILD

... It was constructed by the Brotherhood of Purity, and is referreed to as the Ark of Humanity. The only people allowed to go there are members of the Brotherhood, genetically pure humans. The Moon Child is gigantic and has been constructed to easily support thousands of people . . .

The ultimate purpose of the Moon Child is to provide a safe haven for the faithful while the Earth is going through its final "Purification." I don't know exactly what the Purification entails, but I believe it's directly related to the experiments we've been doing here at G.R.S.





There's some more stuff about this Brotherhood and its Secret Doctrine. Sounds like your standard bunch of whacked-out cultists to me. The only difference is that they've got roots that extend centuries, if not millenia, back into history. And worse, they've got power, money, a space station, and some pretty scary genocidal know-how.

Well, I've got a damning load of background information. But it won't do me any good if we're all laying around rotting in a few days. Hell, I still don't know what happened to DuBois or Eva Schanzee.

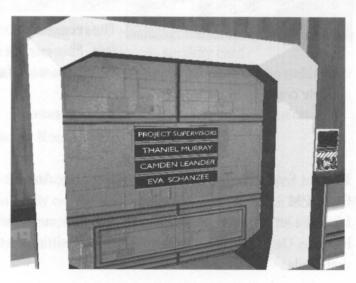
And where's the Winter Chip?

Time for another foray into the deadly halls of G.R.S.

G.R.S. — Project Supervisor's Room 9:35 PM

I exited the R & D Office, turned left, hustled down the hall to the next door — the Project Supervisor's Office — and got inside without incident. The security probe made its sweep shortly thereafter, but I found another good hiding spot behind the partition wall in the back right corner.

After the sweep, I hustled out and examined the glassed-in High Security Area. There was a recessed door, and a small air vent — too small for me — and no other readily apparent way to get in.



Project Supervisor's Office

This is where Eva Schanzee used to hang out. Get in, quick!





The hex wrench I'd lifted from the R & D room fit the vent bolts perfectly. I pulled off the grate and peeked through. Rooms like this, I knew, usually have security systems. Sometimes they're deadly.

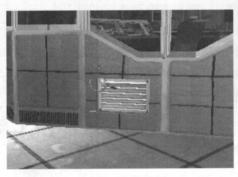
Amazingly, I still had my little geigger buddy with me in his little cage. I'd been carrying it under my trench coat all day. I'm always doing that with geiggers. (Don't ask me why, please. You're supposed to have suspended your disbelief long ago, damn it.)

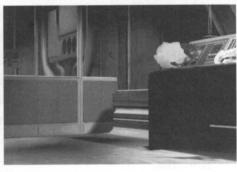
I put the cage to the vent opening and slid open its door. Mr. Geigger hopped out and immediately made his way toward a putrifying roast beef sandwich that must have been sitting there for days. In the process, the little monster tripped some detector, and got fried.

Oops!

Hey, who knew?

Geigger Bricquet Once you get that vent open, use your little buddy to clear the way for you.





The recessed door opened.
Poor little guy. He must've tripped

something on the console, or maybe the old roast beef sandwich spontaneously combusted. At least he got me in.

Gotta hurry now, before the next security sweep.

Project Supervisor's Room (High Security Area) 9:40 PM

I found a lot of interesting items in the High Security Area, as you might imagine. On the far desk, I found a mini-disk sitting on top of a note that reads:





Memo To: Marcus Tucker

This disk was confiscated from Eva Schanzee before she was imprisoned on the Moon Child. We are still searching her personal effects

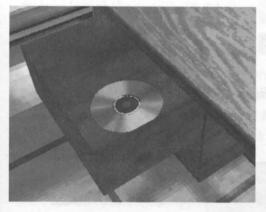
for any sign of the Winter Chip.

The mini-disk, I figured, came from Eva's desk computer. I wish the note mentioned where her "personal effects" are stashed.

Next, I turned my attention to the desk drawers. In one, I found a laserdisc entitled "So



Traces of Eva The note suggests that Ms. Schanzee is still alive. Now, where can I boot up her mini-disk?





Have a LaserDisc and a Smile And don't forget that security card in the bottom left drawer. It will look really impressive in your wallet.

You're Starting a New Job at G.R.S" — narrated by Marcus Tucker. In the drawer just below it, I found a room access security card.

Naturally, I lifted both items. Then I went out to Eva Schanzee's desk.

Project Supervisor's Room (Eva Schanzee's Area) 9:45 PM

I'm moving pretty fast now, and recording as I move. I'm looking at Eva's computer. It undoubtedly contains a motherlode of information, but I need her access card. Of course, they probably confiscated it from her. But a good agent would plant one nearby.





Aha. Down here, under the desk. There it is, taped to the side on the right. I turned on Eva's computer, used the access card on it, then inserted

How Low Can You Get? Low enough to get a glimpse of that computer access card under Eva's desk



the mini-disk. And . . . there she is. It's a series of Eva's personal logs, recorded right into the computer! We recorded them as they play. Here we go:

Voice of Eva Schanzee:

Entry #1: "I've made initial contact with the cult. The Colonel's information was right on. There are at least two employees here that are members.

I haven't been able to find a solid link between G.R.S. and the cult, but I'm sure Tucker knows what's going on.

"Over the past month, I've been letting people know that I support

Schanzee Isn't she just the perfect agent to infiltrate a bunch of nuts obsessed with genetic perfection?



the Eugenics Movement.
Finally, I was contacted
today by a cult member
named Murray. He's a project supervisor. I'll be attending an initiating meeting
tomorrow night."

Entry #2: "I've gotten to know one of the young researchers, Paul DuBois. I'm fairly sure he knows

nothing about the cult. He told me that Tucker doesn't trust most of his staff and has the project groups working separately."





Entry #3: "Nine or ten people came to the meeting in Tucker's office. The only ones I knew were Tucker, Murray, and Paul. I got the name of only one other cult member, a creepy little Nazi named Camden Leander. He seemed to be the highest-ranking member. I didn't learn much; they seemed more concerned with grilling me and Paul.

Entry #4: "I don't think Paul is cut out for the cult. I think he has attended the meetings to get to know me. I've advised him to get out while he can. Also, there's a young woman named Alaynah Moore who works as Tucker's assistant. She doesn't seem to know exactly what's going on here. But I think she knows too much for her own good, and she'll probably be eliminated when the current project is finished. I've warned her to get out of the company."

Entry #5: "It looks like the project is almost completed. The cult members are ecstatic. I keep hearing them use the words Purification and Alluvion. I don't know what they mean, but whatever's going to happen is going to happen soon. I'm not going to use the chip until I have a better idea of what they're up to."

Entry #6: "At our last meeting, there was an older man. He looked familiar, but I couldn't place him. Apparently he's in charge. I noticed him staring at me during the meetings. Afterwards, he pulled me aside and said there would be a special place for me 'in the new order.' I'm going to play along."

Well, I've seen about all I can in this room. I still haven't found Tucker's office, and I'll bet there are more rooms of interest on this level.





Conference Room 10:00 PM

I dashed into the Conference Room just ahead of the security eye. This time, I found a good hiding spot behind a standard office desk in the corner. After the sweep, I got up and looked around.

Conference Room Here's where the mucky-mucks play their games. Yeah, I can smell the

fear in the air.



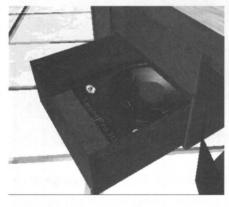
At one end of the conference room was a huge video screen, one that would make my home movies really howl to

life. I noted a remote control panel on the conference table. But the cabinet that no doubt houses the VCR equipment was locked tight.

As usual, I rifled the desk drawers. It was interesting to see that even genetic purity types find *Playbub Magazine* to be an indispensible part of corporate culture. I also found a laserdisc player. Combined with the TV, it

The Doomsday Advantages
Since the end of the world is days away, nobody really minds if I borrow this laserdisc player! Isn't

that great?



now gave me a complete audio/visual system. When I loaded in the "Welcome to G.R.S." laserdisc, I finally got a look at Marcus Tucker himself.

"Hello, I'm Marcus Tucker," he said. I flicked it off. I'd seen enough. I was anxious to find Tucker's office, so I skipped a more thorough investigation of the Conference

Room and headed back out into the hallway.

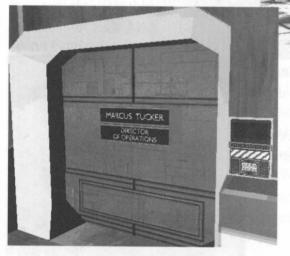




G.R.S. — Marcus Tucker's Office 10:05 PM

Tucker's office was the next door down. It had a special access panel, but the passkey card I found back in the Project Supervisor's office worked just fine.

Another security sweep sent me scrambling for cover. The plants in the corner kept me safe. Speaking



of safes, Tucker had the huge walk-in variety in his office. A glance at the safe access panel told me it was voice-activated, and probably responded only to Tucker's sweet tenor. Which I happened to have at my disposal.

Tucker's Door

Seems more complicated than the other doors, but the passkey gets you right in. Once you do get in, though, hide behind the plants during security sweeps.

Before my electronic ventriloquist act, I wanted to scour the rest of the office. In one desk drawer, I found a piece of masking tape with the

number
"142235" — a
safe combination, no doubt. In
another drawer I
found low-tech at
its finest — an
old-fashioned
red-tip wooden
match.

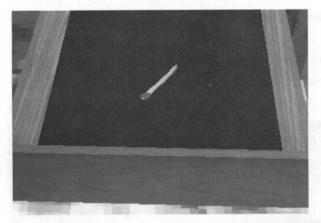


"Hello, I'm Marcus Tucker." For a few seconds, anyway.





Got a
Match?
I do, now.
I've also got a
number —
142235.
What it
means, who
can say?



OK, time to take on Tucker's super-safe. My loaded A/V equipment worked great on the voice-access panel. But then the security system threw me for a loop when it suddenly said: "Stand by for DNA scan."

DNA scan? Wow. This thing was more sophisticated than anything I'd ever seen.

Naturally, I flunked. "DNA incompatible," said the robotic voice. "Attention, Security.
Intruder on premises."

I figured I had about a minute before that damned probe would be in my face. So I



rushed into the safe and grabbed whatever I could find — a videocassette, some shreds of note in a wastebasket, even a stupid Buddha statue. Then I sprinted back to my hiding place behind the plants.

Just in time, I might add. As the security eye floated into Tucker's safe, I got a wild idea. I rushed over to the access panel and turned it OFF. The door closed. I took a breath. Nothing else happened. Apparently, I had trapped the probe in the safe.

Rid of the pest, finally.

With time on my hands, I took a closer look at the Buddha statue — and, klutz that I am, managed to shatter the thing into a thousand pieces. One of which happened to be none other than the Winter Chip!





Well, I'll be darned. It was right here under the cult's nose the whole time.

Finally, I had what I needed for the final confrontation. I slipped the Winter Chip in the secret compartment of my watch.



The Winter Chip

It was hidden nicely in that Buddha statue. Maybe I'd better keep it hidden — but do I have any super-secret stuff in my inventory?

But I couldn't help but feel I had unfinished business in these offices.

First of all, there was that number I'd found in Tucker's desk — a safe combination, was my guess. And then, the shredded note. It must be important, or it wouldn't be shredded or stashed in a high-security safe. The same holds true for the videocassette. What's on it?

Trusting that the security probe was stuck in the safe for good, I sat down to piece together the note shreds. It took a while, but here's the full text:

Brother Marcus:

We are seekers of purity who will abide no defect in spirit or form. The time is close at hand—your work was exemplary and adhered in every detail to the holy prophecies. Now that we have the sacred relic in our possession, our plans can be carried out.

I regret that you had to eliminate DuBois. Alas, such is the folly of man. Schanzee is being held on the Moon Child and will pay dearly for her treachery. Also, as feared, Brother Thaniel was not genetically suitable for our Order and had to be retired.





Now your instructions. Go to the Bastion of Sanctity (Long: 122 degrees 47' ll", Latit: 41 degrees 28' 6"). Upon arriving, the Chameleon will provide transport, though he will not travel with you to the Moon Child just now, as he has other business to attend to before joining us.

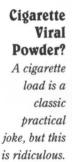
Godspeed Brother.

At last, the Chameleon.

I'd better get to this Bastion of Sanctity soon. But first, I want to take another look around the offices. Maybe I can get access to the VCR in the conference room and take a peek at this videocassette. I just have the unsettling feeling that I've missed something.

Project Supervisors Room 11:15 PM

Well, my feelings about missing something proved correct. Back in the Project Supervisors Room I found that I'd completely overlooked a wall





safe. And sure enough, the number taped in Tucker's desk — 142235 — proved to be the combination.

Inside, I found something labeled "cigarette viral powder." Odd thing to keep in a safe. Odd thing, period. How "viral" is it? Could this be the killer virus? Anybody for a smoke?

Well, I'll check the Conference Room once more, then call it a night.



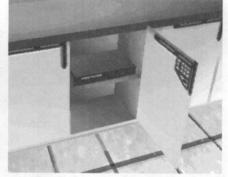


Conference Room 11:45 PM

Now that I had more time, I was able to find the cabinet key on the wall ledge, open the console, and turn on the VCR that I just *knew* was in there. Then I popped in the videocassette I'd found and went over to the remote

control on the table.





Cabinet Key
Not a real
common place
to keep a key,
but hey,
eugenicists are
uncommon
people. And it
fits perfectly in
the VCR
cabinet lock

I turned on the remote. The show that ran sent a big, double-striped chill down my back, then up again for good measure. These guys were serious. They had a doomsday virus, and they were going to use it.

I hustled out to my speeder. Eddie Ching was right. I had the weight of ten billion souls riding on my shoulders. As the overdrive kicked







Doomsday: The Video Ghastly. Horrific. But you have to admire the production values.

in, I couldn't help but gaze down at the lights of the city. Were they about to be extinguished . . . forever?





Office 12:30 AM

Sure am glad to be out of G.R.S. I need to catch a few winks before I go anywhere else. First thing in the morning, I'll go check on Alaynah.







Epilogue: Day 4

Hello again, Murphy. Remember me? If not . . . how about now?





The ability to change forms is a talent I was born with. The metamorphosis is difficult to explain, but I've found it quite useful.

I haven't had a chance to thank you for your efforts to our cause. You did us a great favor in retrieving the statuette. It was the last key to fulfilling our ancient prophesies. Now we wait until the appointed time.

Incidently, I've kidnapped your girlfriend. I know you're looking for a certain computer chip. Abandon your search now and I won't harm Miss Moore. It would be a shame to kill her.

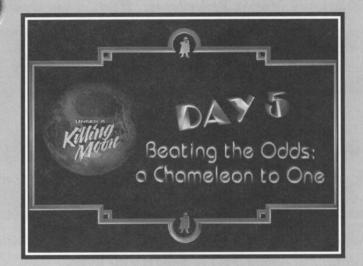
Besides, it's not easy stuffing a head into one of those water coolers. Just ask your friend, Pug. He's cooling off right now.







Part]







Case Log Transcript: 12-15-42

Tex's Office 5:00 AM

I tried for an hour to get Pug's head out of the water cooler, but it was no dice. The police showed up and thought about grilling me until they realized Pug was a mutant. Then it was like they couldn't care less.

That's the trouble with this world. A life's still a life. Whether it's mine or Pug's, it still has to count for something. If a crime against humanity is committed,



Get the
Pug Outta
Here
I just can't
seem to get
ahead this
morning.

someone should have to pay for it.

The Chameleon killed Pug for no good reason, and he's kidnapped Alaynah. I'm not about to let him get away with it. Not today.

I'm off to the Bastion of Sanctity. I haven't had much sleep, but I'm wired for action.

Bastion Approach 5:30 AM

I heard that some rich guy a few years back bought the remaining pieces of an ancient European castle. This must be the place.

As I approach the coordinates given in the shredded note from





G.R.S., I see a massive structure jutting out from a deeply forested area. The Bastion looks like a medieval castle, but there's nothing romantic about this place. It seems to lay there, a festering evil, like a paper cut gone bad.

Bastion Entry 5:35 AM

I dropped the speeder a good distance away, then worked quietly to the Bastion entrance. It isn't locked, and there are no guards. The place looks deserted.

Field of Dreams
Alaynah's a prisoner in the Bastion of Sanctity, knocked out in a laser cage.



From where I stand now, near the entrance, I can get a good look at the Chameleon.

He's got Alaynah in a laser field.

The effect of the beam is probably keeping her sedated. With the Chameleon out of the way, I can find out how to shut it off.

He's pacing around, smoking like a brushfire, and talking to

himself. I don't know what he's smoking, but he looks higher than an infield fly. Apparently, he's really enjoying his rich, imported cigarette.

Maybe I can get him to stop smoking permanently. First, I'll have to

Corridor
I'll take this little detour to the
right, then
try some
diversionary
tactics.



create some sort of a smokescreen, and get him out of the main room.

There's a passageway on either side just before you enter the main room. My guess is that a corridor rings around the main room. Maybe I can find something to keep the Chameleon occupied for awhile.





Bastion Passageway 7:00 AM

I worked my way along the damp walls of the corridor. On the right, I found a vee clamp stuck to a coat of arms. It was too weird, so I just had to borrow it. A little further down the passage, I came to an alcove. A very old vase sat on a shelf there. It looked nice and breakable. Perfect for a distraction. But it was too high up to reach.

Just below the vase, an ugly gargoyle head seemed to be winking at me. It gave me the creeps . . . and then I noticed that one of its gemstone

eyes was missing. Ever the looter, I plucked out the other one.

The stone was small but dense

— heavy enough to do some damage to that vase, anyway.

Unfortunately, the old arm isn't what it used to be. I wasn't sure I could get enough velocity on a throw. I decided to keep looking. Maybe I could find a more accessible vase. Just up



Vase
That vase up
there really
destroys the
esthetic
balance of
this alcove.
I'd better
smash it.

ahead, a perfectly harmless bungee cord hung on the wall. Sometimes I can't believe my fortune. Is it luck?

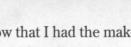


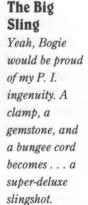




Or am I just that good? Now that I had the mak-

ings of my distraction, I wanted to be ready for action when the









Chameleon came to investigate. But what action? I pictured the Chameleon in there, smoking like a fiend. Then I remembered my Cigarette Viral Powder. How could I get some into his cigarette? The obvious answer: I couldn't.

But wait, I thought. I have one of his cigarettes, don't I? I plucked it from my pocket. The one I'd nabbed from the faux-Countess mansion.

Perfect.

I carefully packed the powder into the cigarette. Then, just to save time, I lit it with the red-tip wooden match I'd found in Marcus Tucker's





desk. I hurried back to the alcove. and hooked the bungee cord to the vee clamp handles. Then I loaded the gemstone into my makeshift slingshot . . . aimed at the vase . . . and bang! Boy, anybody who says investigative work is tedious drudgery just hasn't tried this.

Avoiding the Chameleon, I

hurried back down the passage to the Bastion entry, then slipped quietly into the main room. As I'd hoped, he'd left his cigarette in the ashtray. I replaced it with the virus-packed cigarette, then slipped into a side alcove.

OK, everything was in place. Now if he'd just go for it. Yeah, here he

The Old Cig Switch Gosh, this is fun. We used to pull this stunt back in the old Sigma Ep days. Of



comes, I thought. Come on, come on. Over to the table for some real smoking enjoyment. He's got it. That's it. Smoke away, sucker. Gotcha!

The Chameleon sipped his smoke, coughed, and collapsed to the ground. I stepped forward from my hiding place and picked up the lethal cigarette.





"Didn't anyone ever tell you," I said, "that these things can kill you?"
He gave me an agonized little smile. "I underestimated you, Murphy,"
he gasped. "Viral powder in my cigarette — very clever. You're a worthy
opponent."

"Well, you know," I said, "I think the world will be a *much* nicer place without people like you, people who go around stuffing other people's heads into water coolers."

Through gritted teeth, he said: "But you've accomplished *nothing*. Except now, I'll be a martyr in the New Order. And you'll die with all the other vermin in the Great Alluvion." He could barely speak now. "And when the earth has returned to a state of perfection and the purified races return after the waiting, my name will live *forever*."

I nodded. "Yeah, I guess that's good," I said. "In theory. Too bad you won't be around to enjoy it."

His voice was a halting rasp now. "Death means nothing," he said. "I would die a thousand times . . . to help fulfill . . . the sacred prophecies." He was fading fast. "Enjoy your victory while you can, Murphy. Tomorrow night . . . you will die."

His head fell back. As his spirit passed on to whatever waits on the other side, his body convulsed through a horrific set of metamorphoses.

Death is always an ugly business. But I must say, I caught a lucky break getting rid of him this easily.

Now I had to get Alaynah out of the force field.









So The Surgeon General Was Right I'll be darned. Well, you'll never catch me smoking viral powder again.





Shielded Switch Turn off the laser field with that switch behind the ornamental shield



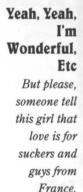
That proved easy enough. On the wall behind Alaynah, I found a loose shield. I pushed it, and it moved to expose a switch. I flipped it, and the laser field shut down. Alaynah woke up.

When she saw me, she cried, "Tex! I knew you'd come!"

She lept up and threw her arms around me.

"That, that *monster* came to the motel," she said. "He looked just like you, so I opened the door. He

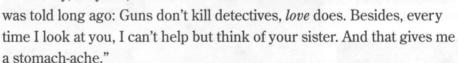
must've knocked me out. It was terrible! The things he said to me! Oh,





Tex, hold me, kiss me!"

"Sorry, Alaynah," I said. "But like I



"But Tex, I . . . I think I'm in love with you," she said sadly.

"Well, that's nice of you to say," I said. "But I'm pretty sure you've got your family's genes, and it just wouldn't work out."

She brushed at her hair and gave me one of those looks — you







know the one I'm talking about. "Are you sure there's *nothing* I can do to make you stay?"

I thought about this.
"Hmmm. Do you play
Twistee? Nah, never mind.
No Alaynah, I don't think I
could do it. You know, you're
young enough to be my...



Alaynah Moore Once her hormones settle down, she'll be alright. She'll even give you a good lead,

eventually.

my younger sister. But right now I've got a job to do, and I've got to do it alone. Unless I stop the cult from executing their plan, we're *all* gonna be toast."

She shook her head sadly. "Men worth having are always running off," she said. But then she brightened a bit. "Maybe it wouldn't work out for us, anyway. If they don't kill you, let me buy you a drink. I owe you a big one."

"OK, well maybe some day you can buy me one of those 46-ounce Super Gulpers," I said. "But what I really need right now is a good lead."

"The Chameleon said that he was supposed to meet up with someone named Ferrel Pus," she said. "At a place called The Broken Skull. Does that help?"

I nodded. "Yeah, it does, as a matter of fact."

I'd heard of the The Broken Skull. Who hadn't? It's the infamous saloon inside the primary waystation that sits in geosynchronous orbit 22,370 miles above the Earth. It doesn't surprise me that someone named Pus is a Skull regular. A lot of "adventurers" hang out there — rocket jockeys, penal rejects, and other space riff-raff. Waiting to catch the next shuttle to the mining colonies on the moon or Mars, or to any number of corporate space stations.

Ah, well.

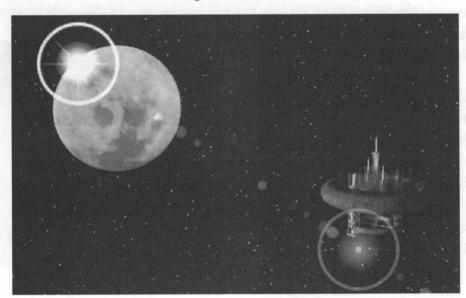
Looks like it's time to break out the old G-suit.





"He summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends... to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in ... Without was the 'Red Death."

- Edgar Allan Poe



"Is that the final group?"

"Yes, brother. Everyone has arrived."

"And all the provisions are stored? What about the wine? We hadn't received the shipment when I last checked the inventory."

"All is in order, brother. We have sufficient supplies to take us into the next century."

"Excellent. I will notify the Master that everything is prepared. The celebration is set to begin at the appointed hour."





The Broken Skull 1:30 PM

It was a long trip off-planet, but the shuttle ride gave me some time to digest everything that's happened — and catch a much-needed nap, too.

The waystation is small, with a diameter of maybe five thousand meters. I had no problem finding the Broken Skull, which turns out to be a typical off-world saloon — the kind of place where all the booze is watered down, the prices are tripled, and the waitresses all have fresh stitches on their foreheads.



Waystation
Nice place to
visit, but . . .
nah, I wouldn't
even want to
visit.
Unfortunately,
I have to find
this Ferrel Pus.

It was strangely quite, though, and the dame behind the bar looked like she'd just as soon cut my throat as pour me a drink.

"So what'll you have?" she said sullenly.

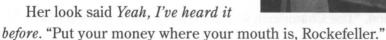
"Give me four fingers of rye whiskey, neat," I said, holding up four fingers as a visual aid.

"You know, we don't take American Express," she said with a wicked grin. "Cash customers only."

I grinned back. "Do you take out-of-state cash?"

"We'll take any cash with the 'Made in the USA' logo on it," she said.

My hand fingered the \$100 bill I'd slipped in my pocket before catching the shuttle up. I knew this was a woman with knowledge and connections. "Let's not mince words," I said. "I'll give you a C-note for some information."





Lois the Bartender Wait, her name's not Lois. Why did I think that?





I slapped the bill on the table. She snatched it up and said, "OK, moneybags. One question."

Right now, transportation was the issue. I decided, what the hell, go for the gold: "Can you help me find a ride to the Moon Child?"

She gave me a wary look. "Do you have the token?" she asked.

Whoops. I started slapping at the various pockets on my trench coat. "Uh, let me check," I said. "No, I . . . it must be in my other overcoat."

I'm always amazed when this routine works. She looked skeptical,

Token?
Did you say
token? Geez,
Alaynah didn't
say anything
about a token.
Maybe I'd
better ask her
about it.



but said, "Look, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. I mean, maybe you're one of us and maybe you're just an idiot. Go find your token." Her eyes narrowed. "But if you come back here without it, don't plan on leaving."

I caught the next shuttle down to the city. Maybe

Alaynah heard something about this token business during her stay with the Chameleon.

Roadside Motel 3:00 PM

These orbital/deorbital jumps are wreaking havoc on my sinuses. My head is aching. When I got to the motel, Alaynah nearly jumped into my arms again. "Thank goodness you're alright!" she said. "I've been worried sick."

I asked her if she knew anything about the token I needed for a Moon Child visit.

She nodded. "The Chameleon said something about using an old





silver dollar as a token," she said.

"Silver dollar?"

"I don't know where you could find one," she said. "They're so rare."

I thanked her and abruptly hurried out, knowing she'd probably want to play parlor games if I dallied. Anyway, I knew just the guy to ask about old silver dollars. I happened to live right across the street from him.

Rook's Pawnshop 3:30 PM

Good old Rook. I knew he'd come through. When I asked him about silver dollars, he had what I needed. "Yeah, I've got a couple of old Susan B. Anthony silver dollars in my coin collection," he said. "They're pretty expensive, though I guess I owe you something."

He slipped me the coin, and I was off to The Broken Skull once again.

The Broken Skull 6:00 PM

The bartender stood there as if she hadn't moved since I saw her last. She folded her arms under her ample chest and said, "Did you find what you were looking for?"

"Yeah," I said. "It went through the wash, but I think it'll work."

"Well, let's see it," she said. "I haven't got all day."

I gave her the silver dollar. She seemed a little disappointed. I think she was looking forward to having me decapitated.

"OK, OK," she said. "Go knock on that door and say 'jacks or better.'
The man you need to see is in there."





Ferrellette Room 6:25 PM

After updating my log, I walked down the hall and looked at the name tag on the door — Ferrel Pus. Must be a charming guy, I thought. I called out the password and a gravelly, grating voice called loudly for me to come in.

As I stepped into the back room, I was blasted by an aromatic wave of cigar smoke, alcohol, fish, and body sweat. The combination almost knocked me out. The room was empty, except for a bloated hog of a man

who seemed to be the source of all the foul odors.

"I ain't seen *you* here before," he snivelled. "Who the hell are ya?"

"My friends call me Tex," I said, smiling. "You can call me Mr. Murphy, unless you'd like to be my friend."

Pus yanked the stogie from his mouth. "You know, I made a bet that you wasn't stupid enough to use your real name." He slid a

gun out of the back of his trousers. "I guess we both lose, Murphy."

"You know, Mr. Pus," I said, sitting in a chair across from him. "It's not only rude, but it's also illegal to point a Lester Flame Rod at a total stranger."

"Haw, haw!" he guffawed. "You're not a total stranger. I been waiting for ya for a while now . . . though I *thought* you was gonna come up with that Chameleon." He rammed the stogie back in his mouth.

The guy was starting to make me sick. "So you're disappointed the Chameleon isn't here, huh?" I said, getting to my feet again. "Why? Was

My Buddy, Ferrel Pus Wooo. Don't breathe near

wooo. Don't breathe near this guy. One whiff will shut down your autonomic nervous system.





he your girlfriend?"

This brought Pus to his feet, howling. "Hell, I oughtta blow your head off right now!" he bellowed. "But, I ain't gonna. I like watchin' ya *sweat*..." He sat back down.

I was pacing, trying to keep sharp. I turned to him and said, "You know, I'll bet you do. It probably makes your own body odor less noticeable."

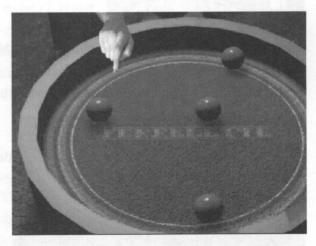
Poor Pus lost his head again. "Watch your mouth, boy, or I'll blow your damn head off!" he shouted, jabbing the gun at me. "My boss told me that when ya got here I should take care of ya. Now, *sit down!*"

I casually returned to the chair. I love guys like Pus. I said, "Well, great! I'd like a Mai Tai with *two* umbrellas and a nice plate of those cocktail weenies."

Pus splurted out a wicked laugh. "I don't think so," he said. "I think he wanted me to slit your throat . . . but there ain't no sport in that, so I'm gonna give ya a chance to beat the odds." He cackled again.

"Oh, I've beaten a few odds in my time," I said.

Suddenly, the floor in front of him opened. Then an odd, bubble-top table rose up from below. The bubble slid back, revealing a plush green tabletop and four red billiard balls. "I'll guarantee you haven't beaten *this*," said Pus. "I call it the Ferrelette Table. Three of them



Ferrelette, Anyone? Nothing like a few rounds of everyone's favorite game before bedtime.

balls are hollow and there's a spidrone in each one. They're little robotic arachnids with nasty stingers."

Great. I hate robotic arachnids. I said, "Well, dare I ask what's in the





fourth ball?"

Pus pointed his stogie at me. "Inside that one is part of a ticket to the Moon Child," he said. "I'll mix 'em around, then you just have to pick the ball with the ticket and open it up. Do that four times and I'll take you to the Moon Child."

I stroked my chin, staring at him. "Sounds like the old shell game to me," I said.

"Close enough," said Pus. "Here's the ball with the ticket. Let's play." He pointed to a ball and said, "OK, pick a ball, any ball."

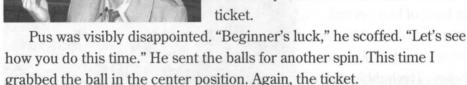
Pus activated some kind of magnetic mechanism that sent the balls swirling around the table. I'd played versions of this game at carnivals before, and I knew it was generally rigged. But I had no choice, so I kept

my eye on the ticket-ball as best I could.

When the balls finally stopped moving, I picked up the one in the northeast position. I knew that a spidrone bite was usually lethal, so I prepared for the worst. I opened it . . . and there was the

how you do this time." He sent the balls for another spin. This time I grabbed the ball in the center position. Again, the ticket.

Good Guess But can you do it four times in a row?



Don't Do This

I know it's incredible, but I actually took these pictures inside my head while imagining what would happen if I picked the wrong ball.





Pus was getting agitated. "Dammit!" he yelled. "I guess I need to





speed up the balls a little bit. Well, third time's the charm . . . for me."

Again, the balls did their dance. This time I went for the one in the south position.

Bingo.

"Lucky today, aren't we?" said Pus. "I can't wait to see a spidrone tear your head off." Then, with a slight hint of admiration, he added: "No one's gotten this far before, Murphy. It'd be a real shame if you screwed up now."

And off went the balls, in a frenzy. I lost track of the ticket-ball almost immediately. It was going to be a pure guess this time. I reached for the ball in the south position again.

I opened it. We both looked down.

"Damn you, Murphy!" howled Pus. "I wanted to see you die!" He slowly tucked his pistol away. "But we did make a deal. I'm taking a few people up to the Moon Child in a couple of hours. You can go with us." He coughed, then added: "I have some business to take care of. Wait at the bar until we leave. Drinks are on me. Be sure to ask for the house special. It's my favorite."

So Tex Murphy does it again, by the skin of his teeth. I'm about to head back down to the bar for a drink. Do I deserve it? We'll see.

The Broken Skull 7:00 PM

The bartender looked happy to see me. "Sit down, brother," she said. "Have a drink, it's on the house."

"Free drinks?" I said. "Doesn't that eat up the profits?"

"That's pretty funny," she laughed. "This waystation's gonna be a ghost town tomorrow. I intend to drink as much of the good stuff as I can before we fly off to the Promised Land."

"Ah, the Promised Land," I said. "Should be quite a party. So, when are we leaving?"





"Oh, it won't be long now," she said, rubbing her hands together. I couldn't quite tell if she was entirely happy about it or not. "The Purification will be tomorrow at midnight."

"Well, finally, the holy prophecies are coming true," I said, getting into the role a bit thickly. "By the way, Ferrel told me to ask about the house special."

Her eyes widened. "Oh, really?" she said. "Well, Ferrel's always been



partial to the house special." She poured a shot of a thick-looking liquid and handed it to me. "Here you go."

Hmmm. The stuff was rancidsmelling. Plus, I didn't like the look on her face when I mentioned the "house special." So I said, "I'd really rather have a few fingers

the creosote we always used to de-worm Uncle Morty's pigs.

Bottom's Up,

Murphy

Special"

This "House

reminds me of

of bourbon."

She leaned forward in a friendly way. "Try this first," she purred. "It could make you swear off bourbon."

I took the shot like a man. And within seconds, the room began to do

Lights Out, Murphy Oh, well. I needed the sleep, anyway.



funny aquatic-type things. The last thing I remember is the grinning face of the bartender and her taunting voice: "So, you're Tex Murphy? Well, we're gonna make

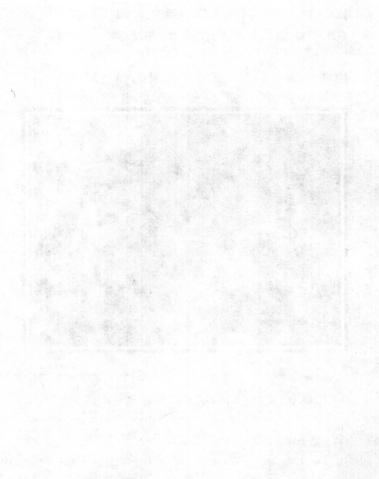
your trip as comfortable as possible." Her fingers

waggled at me. "Nighty-night!"

Her husky laugh reverberated through my head as the world went black.











Part]







"The figure was tall and gaunt and . . . in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed . . . There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made . . . "

- Edgar Allan Poe

Case Log Transcript: 12-16-42

I just turned on my micro-dictaphone. I want to get all this on the record.

Man, I must've died and gone to Heaven. Except I don't think people in heaven have raging hangovers. I must be on the Moon Child. I have to admit, it is incredible. I could get used to living in a place like this. I've never seen anything so beautiful.

What's that sound? Something's coming this way.

Another floating cube. Haven't these people ever heard of the post office?

"Wake up, Mr. Murphy," said the face on the cube. It looked very, very familiar. "We'll have



Nice Place
The Moon Child
— clean living,
happy people,
beautiful
habitat.
Frightening,
isn't it?





no sleeping through the greatest event in the history of the world! I'm so glad you could join us on this sacred day. Maybe you don't recognize me. It has been some time."

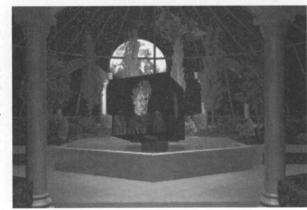
Of course. It was him.

"Lowell Percival," he said, "at your service. You did a job for me on Mars a few years back. Your cleverness and tenacity both then and now have shown me that you belong here. In fact, I need to thank you for securing the statuette for us. The flawless crystal and the symbolic purity of the dove are the foundation of our beliefs."

I can't believe it. I actually worked *with* this guy on the Martian Memorandum case. Now he's the new genocidal maniac. His sermon continued:

"Our sacred text has said that our destiny would be secure only if we had the statuette in our possession. We are deeply in your debt." He paused for emphasis. "In an hour or so, we will fulfill the ancient prophecy — specifically, the Purification by means of the Great Alluvion. It's a fabulous name for a somewhat nasty process."

At least the snake had it in him to be honest on occasion. I wondered, What happens if you fungo a cube across an arboretum? "Those creative minds at G.R.S. worked extra hard for a long time to make our prophecy a reality," continued Percival. "It was quite a challenge to come up with a plan that would match the details of the Great Alluvion, as it is described



in our sacred text. It cost me a fortune, but now everything's prepared."

Yeah, nothing like a few billion bucks to make those old prophecies come true, I thought.

Lowell Percival

This raving megalomaniac needs to pull his head out of his . . . cube.





"At midnight I will become the Savior of our dying world!" he intoned. "The earth has become a rotting shell, inhabited by a mongrel breed of half-humans that infest the pure races with their filthy, mutated genes." He was showing his true colors now. "Is that to be the fate of mankind? The earth must be thoroughly *cleansed* for mankind to be saved! Soon we'll release the Seeds of Purification. The Great Alluvion, the Baptism of Fire, which follows will destroy all life on earth . . . but from the ashes will arise a glorious new age!"

Any other whacko like him would be carted off to a rubber room now for a little strap-down, drug-aided nighty-night. But rich guys just get to make their dreams come true, no matter how twisted and perverse.

"In keeping with the sacred prophecies," he said, "we'll wait forty years here on the Moon Child. Then our genetically pure children will return to a world that, like them, is clean and unspoiled. Though I may not live to see it, I will die peacefully, knowing that I have given mankind a purified world. I designed this Moon Child to be the Ark of Humanity, but it is also a splendid place to spend the next forty years. We have it all here: aquariums, aviaries, zoos with animals of all kinds, forests, rivers, mountains, nightclubs, ballparks. Everything you could ever want."

I began to survey the room for escape routes. If I had to listen to much more of this, Percival and his cult wouldn't need any doomsday virus to sicken me to death.

"And the people!" he gushed. "Only the *creme de la creme*: architects, bankers, doctors, artists, musicians, even a former president. And as for the women — they're all beautiful, intelligent, accomplished." I saw the goat's gleam in his eye, and thought of Eva Schanzee's story. "One thousand men, women, and children all bound together by belief and purpose: a desire to create a world free of imperfections. A society of harmony and peace without fear, without crime."

Time for the close. This guy could have made a killing in real estate.

"Share in our dream, Mr. Murphy," he said. "You have less than an hour to decide. I can't allow you to attend the big Purification Party, but I'll





be down to see you right after. I'm sure you'll agree that your options are limited."

So, Lowell Percival is behind all this. His offer *is* tempting. It sounds like paradise. And there's probably no way to stop the cult now, so maybe I should just make the best of this.

Hold on, Murphy. Don't forget what they've got in mind. They intend to wipe out every person that doesn't happen to meet their standards.

I wouldn't last very long in a club like this. I could never be a part of

Murphy's Dilemma To be or not to be? It's all Shakespearian as hell, isn't it?



their
Brotherhood.
I've got to find
a way to stop
them, but I'm
going to need
some help. If
Eva Schanzee
is still alive —
and if I can
find her — the

two of us might be able to figure something out. Maybe it's too late, but I've got to do *something*.

Moon Child Arboretum 10:45 PM

I looked through the pockets of my overcoat, but they've taken everything. All I've got left is the watch I found at the Countess' mansion. It could be a lot worse, though. At least they didn't find the Winter Chip.

I need to get out of this arboretum. But I can hear someone pacing on the other side of the only door. A glance at the PuffBuster smoke detector above the door gives me an idea, though.



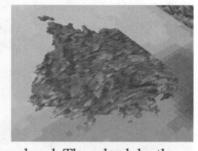


Moon Child Arboretum 11:00 PM

I needed a few things to make my plan work. First, a good, smoke-producing material. I found that in a neat little pile right at my feet.

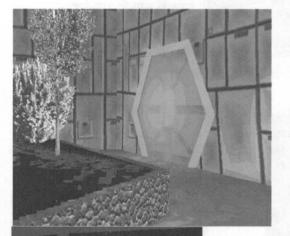
Then, in a storage closet down the path to the left, I made another hot discovery — high-octane lighter fluid in a Point n' Squirt container. Very convenient. Now all I needed was some way to get the stuff lit.

Just to the left of the cube sculpture, I found a loose stone in the rock wall. It was smooth, shiny, and fit snugly in the palm of my hand. Then, back by the

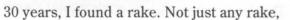


Tinderbox
Woodsy the
Owl would
be very
angry if
someone
played with
combustible
things near
this pile of
dry leaves.

windows looking out on Earth, I found a piece of flint on the rockwall.



On the way back to give my
Tenderfoot
Scout
firestarter
skills their
first test in





Closet Light That door down the path holds a flaming secret inside.



to Success
With a flint
and a stone,
man can build
a civilization!
(Then, for fun,
he can burn it
to the ground.)

Rocky Road





mind you, but a rugged John Stagg Harvester Rake, *very* solid and heavy. Hey, I've seen enough Marx brothers movies to know what you can do with a rake. I grabbed it and took it to the leaf pile.

Rake
What would
Groucho do
with this
thing?



First, I planted the rake in the pile to create a brilliant booby-trap. Then I used the lighter fluid on the leaves, bashed the flint into the stone to create sparks, and directed them toward the soaked leaves.

Smoke billowed in no time, and I yelled, "Fire!"

The smoke alarm went off.

The guard entered, stamped on the leaves to put out the fire, and got nailed by the rake. Man, it was humorous. Now I'm heading out into the Moon Child Hallway.

Show Time!

For pure entertainment value, there's nothing quite like a John Stagg rake to the old schnozz.

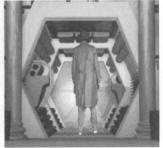




Moon Child Hallway 11:10 PM

11:10 PM

The hallways on this level of the Moon Child are deserted, due to the big Purification Party, no doubt. This level isn't much of a maze, fortunately.





Snooping around, I found an Observation Deck, an Emergency Access door, and passage to Residential Decks, where I found a slim, sturdy piece of pipe on the floor. I grabbed it in case I need to bludgeon any genetically pure goons who might pop up to stop me.

Some further exploration revealed an unmarked door that appeared to open from the other side, and finally, the Stasis Room.

Stasis Room 11:20 PM

As I entered the Stasis Room, I felt like I'd stepped into a fairy tale. I'm no Prince Charming, but there was

definitely a Sleeping Beauty lying peacefully in a cryonic chamber. It was Eva Schanzee.

Boy, did I need to talk to her. As I looked around, I spotted a console nearby. Looking it over, I figured it must be used to control the cryonic sleep state. If I could resuscitate Eva, maybe we could still stop the cult.

One of my least favorite experiences in



life was the "Intro to Cryonics" class I took at

State U., but I did manage to pull a C+ in the course. So I'd seen consoles like this before. The four buttons along the

top administer injections. Two slider controls looked like they regulated the air temperature



Clue! Let's see, now. Lead Pipe. In the Hallway. So it must have been . . . Colonel Mustard!



Eva in Stasis

Behind that door lurks the evil stasis machine!
Though Eva looks awfully peaceful in there, doesn't she? Should I mess with things, or not?



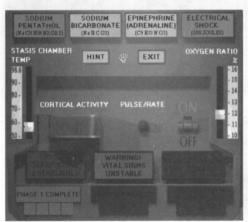


and oxygen level inside the cryonic tube. I remembered that slider mechanisms like these were really sensitive and needed to be moved slowly. *Well*, I thought, *first things first* — I'll need to turn this thing on.

Stasis Reversal: Phase 1

Each phase of a stasis reversal, as I recalled, required a fairly precise sequence of steps. I stepped up to the Stasis Console. Wow. I started by moving the Stasis Chamber Temperature slider to 58 degrees. A red box

Phase 1 Complete Here're the settings to complete the first phase of Eva's stasis reversal

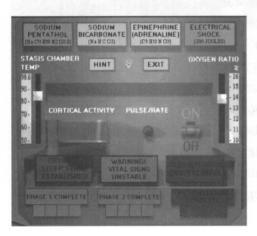


lit up under the Phase 1 Complete indicator. Good start, I thought.

Next, I moved the slider for Oxygen Level to 12%, pushed the Epinephrine button, then the Electric Shock button. When the "Phase 1 Complete" indicator light flashed on, I finally took a breath.

Phase 2 Complete

Here're the settings for the second phase of Eva's resuscitation.



Stasis Reversal: Phase 2

I warmed Eva up another level by sliding the Stasis Chamber Temperature to 86 degrees. Then I pushed the Sodium Pentathol (NaC11H18N202S) button, and again, the Epinephrine button. Finally, I moved the slider for Oxygen Level to 14% — "Phase 2 complete."





Stasis Reversal: Phase 3

Now came the most critical steps. I knew that any heart irregularities in the final phase of resuscitation could often prove fatal, so I moved slowly. First, I pushed the Stasis Chamber Temperature up to the full 98.6 degrees. Eva's body temp was now normal. Then I moved the slider for Oxygen Level to 16%.

The last two steps had me nervous. I couldn't remember if the final adrenaline shot came before or after the dose of sodium bicarbonate. I guessed before, and darned if I wasn't right again.

Eva pulled herself up, stretching life back into her limbs. As her muscles rippled, I decided that it was the most arousing thing I'd ever seen in my life. Then she glared at me. "So, is it all over?" she said with undisguised bitterness.



Resuscitation Complete

A woman doing a cat stretch ranks right up there with nature's greatest wonders.

"Are your prophecies taken care of?"

I liked her spunk. I said, "Look, prophecies aren't in my job description, OK? I'm just a humble P. I. trying to save the world as we know it."

"Well, if you're not in the cult, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"Look," I said, "I think we're running out of time here, but my name's Tex Murphy. I know you're Eva Schanzee because I followed your trail from the Colonel to G.R.S. to up here. So, why don't you tell me how you ended up getting freeze-dried?"

She relaxed a bit, even crossed her legs. She explained, "Percival





has a *thing* for me, so he decided not to have me killed. Instead, he put me into stasis to keep me out of the way until after the Purification."

"Well, I've got some good news and I've got some bad news," I said. "The good news is that the Purification won't start for about 45 minutes. The bad news is we've only got 45 minutes to stop these people. Luckily, I've got the Winter Chip, but you need to tell me how to use it."

Eva looked stunned. "Well, how did you get it?" she asked. But then her sense of the mission at hand returned. "Listen, I know there's no time for explanations now. We have to hurry. Take this."

She pulled a folded sheet of paper from her cleavage and handed it to me. There was a key inside.

I said, "What's this?"

"Instructions on what to do with the Winter Chip," she said. "When

you get into position, wait for my signal. In exactly 30 minutes, I'm going to create a power surge. That will give us our last chance to stop the cult."

I nodded. Eva was a no-nonsense gal. I happen to like no-nonsense gals. Quite a bit, really. More than you could ever possibly know, as a

She gave me her key and mission paper. Wow. Do you think this means we're going steady?

Eva's Stuff

matter of fact.

"That note also has instructions on how to reach the escape pods," she said quickly. "I'll wait until the last second, but hurry." She paused a beat, then added: "And listen, Murphy, good luck. If we get out of here, you can tell me your story."

I nodded, and jogged off down the hallway.

ATTN Agent Estrus
PRONE C.A.P.R.LC.O.R.N. HQ
IN RE. Infiltration of the Moon Child

You are the second agent to get aboard the Moon Child. Agent LOmas was able to transmit marginally detailed information before being discovered and terminated. His transmissions provided us with just enough data to formulate a plan of action. Our computers tabulate its Success/Failure ratio at 37/63.

- Get access to level 18 of the Moon Child. This level contains an Auboretum, a Main Hall, a Stasis Room and an Observatory.
- Locate and retrieve the linkup computer. Agent LOman was able to hide the computer somewhere on Level 18 before he was discovered.
- You will need one of the Moon Child's own computer cables in order to attach the linkup computer to the Moon Child's Main Computer

Her parting sentence sounds great. Too bad it all hinges on the *If we get out of here* clause.





Moon Child Hallway 11:30 PM

Time's running short. I'll just record on the run. Eva's mission paper is critical, so let me read it into the log:

ATTN: Agent EStrus

FROM: CAPRICORN HQ

IN RE: Infiltration of the Moon Child

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- Locate and retrieve the linkup computer. Agent LOman was able to hide the computer somewhere on level 18 before he was discovered.
- You will need one of the Moon Child's own computer cables in order to attach the linkup computer to the Moon Child's Main Computer.
- There is a computer console linked to the Moon Child's Main Computer hidden somewhere in a wall on this level.
- Put the Winter Chip into the linkup computer and attach the linkup computer to the computer console.





• Open an Emergency Exit and move quickly to Bay D-5. We cannot predict the effect of the Winter Chip's virus on the Moon Child's computer system, so it is impossible to say how much time you'll have to reach the escape pod.

Good luck, Agent EStrus.

CAPRICORN High Command

Well, at least I'm on the right level. Now I need to find the linkup computer, some computer cable, and the hidden wall console.

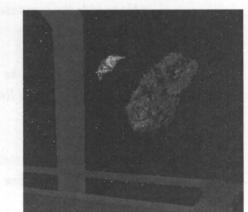
Observation Deck 11:50 PM

I ran down corridors to the Observation Deck. Ten minutes to the Great Alluvion! I hope Eva's ready with her power surge.

Eva's key opened a wall panel back in one corner of the observatory.

OBSERVATION DECK

Inside, I found the mini-computer stashed behind a *Links 986* box. I



Observe This,
Eugenic Scum!

Sure, the
view's nice.
But somebody's
got to put a
stop to these
purity freaks.
Hey . . . why
not me?

pulled it out, and immediately installed the Winter Chip. It was pretty easy, even for a ham-handed,





non-tech guy like me. The computer seemed to be made specifically



to run with the Winter Chip. I now had myself a slick little computer virus link-up. But I still hadn't found the console . . . or any linkup cable, for that matter. In the



Observatory Stash

Behind that space-age croquet software box is the mini-computer of my dreams.

far corner of the observatory, I noticed a different-looking piece of floor panel under a big potted plant. I moved the plant, pried up the panel with my trusty piece of pipe, and found myself looking at the guts of the Moon

Child.

I yanked out a strand of computer cable. It plugged nicely into the mini-computer.

Over by the door, I noticed what at first appeared to be an old-fashioned telephone jack.



But on closer inspection, I realized it was a recessed button. My finger wouldn't fit in the slot, but I found a saranite flex-straw in a cocktail



Floor Model
Hey, there's
something under
that plant.
Whoa . . .
cables!





Straws
Don't Just
Suck
They poke,
too. Giving
you access to
amazing
things.

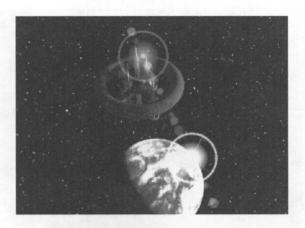


glass on a nearby table. It worked beautifully. A panel slid open, revealing a computer console.

With my computer viral link-up connection complete, I simply plugged the cord into the console port . . . and all hell broke loose.







Epilogue: Day 6

"I've got a system warning on Level 18, Section J. I'm attempting to override that. Now I'm showing a temporary system failure. Climate control is down on Levels 14 through 18."

"Winter Sequence engaged."



"I don't understand it — the whole system

is going haywire!"
"Five minutes to
self-destruct."
"The whole system is shutting



down and I can't do a damn thing about it."

"Dammit! The malfunction has initiated the

Self-Destruct Sequence! Download the backup system!"

"Three minutes to self-destruct."

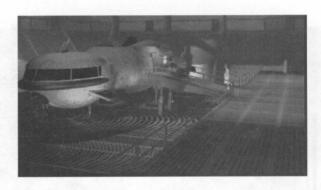


"What the hell's going on down there? We got electrical short fires





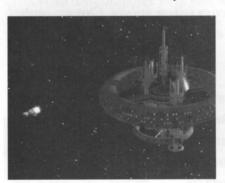




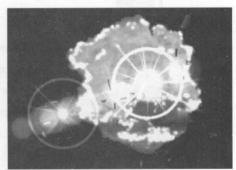
breaking out all over up here!"

"Hull integrity has been compromised! This place is gonna go up like a Roman Candle on the Fourth of July!"

"Two minutes to self-destruct."



"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want — "

















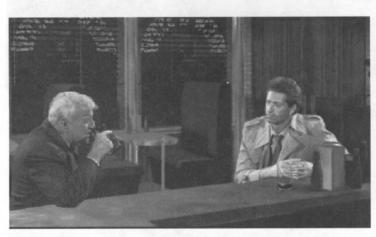
"He had come like a thief in the night.
And one by one dropped the revellers...
and died each in the despairing posture
of his fall... and Darkness and Decay
and Death held illimitable
dominion over all..."

- Edgar Allan Poe

Case Log Transcript: 12-17-42

Brew & Stew 7:00 PM

The Colonel looked remarkably chipper, considering the fact that he'd had a serrated hunting knife buried in his sternum a couple of days ago.



He took a sip of coffee. I fought the perverse urge to stare at his chest to see if any leaked out.

"Ah, you did some good work. Tex." he

said. "I guess you didn't forget everything I taught you. Maybe it's not too late I could make a real detective out of you."

"I don't know," I said. "This saving the world business doesn't pay so well. My cousin Vinnie says he can cut me in on some Amway action."





"That's a load of hooey!" growled the Colonel. "You've got it in your blood, Tex. You'd gumshoe for pocket change."

I laughed. "Hey, pocket change would be a step up for me."

"Well, you know, I've done pretty well over the past few years," he said, grinning. "Put a few greenbacks away. But I'm not so young as I used to be. Maybe we could work out an *arrangement*, eh? I'll be the brains, you be the legs? There's a lot of work out there for somebody with your skills." He paused for effect. "What do you say — partners?"

I thought about it. For about a two seconds. "Hmmmm . . . naw." Suddenly, an Angel of Light wafted across the room — Eva Schanzee. "Eva!" I blurted.

"Oh — hi, Tex," she said with jawbreaking nonchalance. Then she leaned on the counter, right into the Colonel's face. "Hello handsome," she said to him. "Long time, no see. You look as good as ever. What have you been up to?"

"Oh, nothing much," said the Colonel. "Say, tell me, have you still got that Twistee game?" He gave her a look that implied things I'd rather not contemplate.

"I do," she said.
"But I haven't
played it in a
long time."



She pointed her finger playfully, then swayed out the door.

The Colonel pushed himself to his decrepit old feet. "Listen, Tex, something's popped up," he said quickly. "I think I've found a partner to do undercover work with. I'll see you around."





Office 8:00 PM

So, there I was. Back where I started — lonely, broke, and late for an appointment back in my office.

OK, so maybe it's not a perfect world. Maybe there are more glamorous ways to spend Saturday nights than teaching cha-cha lessons to lonely women like Delores Lightbody. At least she's a regular client, and it seems to make her happy. *And* she always pays me up front, in cash.

Now that I think of it, things are better. I've cleared up my bar tab



with Louie. And I did solve the pawnshop burglary for Rook. Yeah, once word gets around, I'll be up to my neck in good-paying jobs.







Epilogue: Day 7



"Looks like Murphy pulled it off, sir."

"Yes, but next time he may not be so fortunate."

"Next time, sir?"

"The forces of darkness sleep, but do not die. Even now, I sense evil stirring . . . an evil about to re-enter the life of our friend, Murphy."





"Tex, honey. Long time no see . . . forgive me?"

— The End —



Tea, koney. Long Hate no tea. Toxotwe and

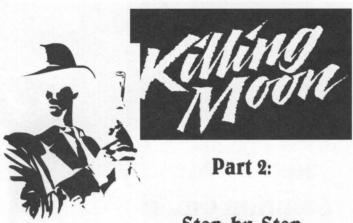


Step-by-Step Solution Guide



Part 2





Step-by-Step Solution Guide

Here's your detailed, step-by-step guide to a successful completion of *Under a Killing Moon*.

Note that this is not the *only* route through the game, not by any means. But this solution path was designed by the creators themselves, and it will maximize your point total. (In fact, my walkthrough earned 1003 points — three more than the listed maximum point total available.)

In this section, I've also listed points earned for *each step* along the solution path. You should be aware that my point totals (listed in parentheses) may sometimes vary slightly from what you get, depending on the order in which you complete tasks in each scene. But the numbers should be very close, and usually exactly the same.



DAY ONE

Tex's Office

- From the mail by the door, get the face-up envelope (on the left, facing the door). You'll get a sales flyer and a credit card application. (1)
- Examine the sales flyer. (4)
- Open inventory and examine the credit card application. (1)
- Get the remaining envelope (a surgery gift certificate) from the mail by the door. (2)
- Look at the fax machine. The message light is flashing, but the machine won't work. (2)
- Look at the Crime Link computer. (2)
- Open the bottom right desk drawer. (1)
- Get the \$10 stamp from the drawer. (1)
- Open the bottom left desk drawer. (1)
- Get the pen from the drawer. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the pen with the credit card application to create a filled-out application. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the stamp with the filled-out application to create a ready-to-mail application. (1)
- Look at the gun on the credenza to the left of the door, then get the gun. (6)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex plays with the gun, etc.
- Look at the picture of Sylvia Linsky on the desk. (8)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex has a flashback about Sylvia.
- Look at, then turn on, the phonograph in the corner. (2)
- Open the office door, exit to the street. (1)



Street

- Cross the street, turn right, and look at the Auto-Postbox. (1)
- Use the ready-to-mail application on the Auto-Postbox. Credit Card will arrive on Day 2. (7)
- Cross the street, go left to the corner, and get the *Bay City Mirror* mutant newspaper laying on the sidewalk. (1)
- Examine the mutant newspaper, then read the article entitled "Burglaries Baffle Police." (5)
- Go to Rook's Pawnshop and look at it. (1)
- Open the door and enter the Pawnshop. (4)

Pawnshop

- Talk to Rook.
- Accept CASE #1. (1)
 (Rook takes you out into the alley.)

Alley

- Move the tipped-over garbage can by the pawn shop steps. (1)
- Get the key from alley that was under the can. (1)
- Look at the footprint. (Note that it's a size 14.) (1)
- Get the glass shard (under window just to right of the pawn shop steps). (1)
- Open inventory and examine the glass shard (to see the red hair strand). (1)
- Open the dumpster and look in. (1)
- Get the radio next to the dumpster. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the radio (to get the batteries). (1)
- Open the garbage can with "Recyclable Papers Only" sign on it. (1)
- Move the fire escape (to lower it).
- Go up the fire escape.



- Look at the door at the top of the fire escape. (6)
- Get the basketball by the chain-link fence. (6)
- Travel back to Tex's office. (1)

Tex's Office

- Turn on the Crime Link computer.
- Enter "shoe size 14, red hair" on Crime Link computer. (2)
- Go out to Chelsee's Newsstand.

Newsstand

- Talk to Chelsee. (1)
- Ask about the BURGLARY (to get info on male, green eyes, anchor tattoo). (1)
- · Go to Tex's office.

Tex's Office

- Enter "male, green eyes, anchor tattoo" on Crime Link computer.
- Travel to the Police Station. (1)

Police Station

- · Talk to Mac.
- Follow dialogue path A, A, C to get info on suspect he's *Caucasian*, *AB-negative*, *non-mutant* (and thus has *two eyes*). (1)
- Travel to Tex's office.



Tex's Office

- Enter "Caucasian, two eyes, AB-, non-mutant" on the Crime Link computer.
- Travel to the alley behind the pawnshop on Chandler Avenue. (2)

Alley

- Talk to Clint. (He won't give you any info yet.) (4)
- Keep talking to Clint until you learn about his chocolate problem. (2)
- Travel to the street on Chandler Avenue, then go to the Brew & Stew. (1)

Brew & Stew

- · Talk to Louie.
- Ask about chocolate (to get the slice of chocolate pie). (1)
- Go to the alley behind the pawnshop.

Alley

- · Talk to Clint.
- Offer him the chocolate pie.
- Ask about the burglary (to get info on suspect's height, weight). (7)
- Travel to Tex's office.

Tex's Office

- Turn on the Crime Link computer.
- Under Height, select 6'0"-6'4".
- Under Weight, select 281-320 lbs.
- Under View Suspect File, select Yes.
- Read the note in Flemm's file (to get Beek Ask About, etc). (16)
- · Go to Chelsee's newsstand.



Newsstand

- Talk to Chelsee.
- Ask about Beek to get the *Coit Tower* destination. (2)
- Go left down the street, turn left at the Golden Gate Hotel, then go through the gap in the fence to Coit Tower. (5)

Coit Tower

- Talk to Beek using dialog path C, A, C.
- Offer him the surgery gift certificate. (4)
- Ask about Mick Flemm to get info on the "Snow White" (now ACME)
 Warehouse. (2)
- Ask about Rusty Clown to get info on "bozophobia." (1)
- After you end the conversation, you're placed back on the street. Go straight ahead to the ACME Warehouse, open the door, and enter. (7)

Warehouse

- Go up the stairs.
- Get "key from warehouse" hanging on the wall at the top of the stairs.
 (1)
- Go back downstairs and use key from warehouse on the pulley control box. (2)
- Open the pulley control box to expose the pulley hook lever.
- Pull the lever in the pulley control box to activate the pulley hook.
- Open the crate. (1)
- Get the fireman's uniform from inside the crate. (1)
- Exit the warehouse and go to Rusty's Fun House.



Rusty's Fun House

- Look at the door to Rusty's.
- Move the doormat.
- Get "key to Rusty's" from under the mat. (2)
- Use key to Rusty's on the front door and enter. (5)
- Get the suction dart crossbow from the first shelf, far left. (1)
- Get the Inspector Burns mask from the floor, between the two shelves of masks. (1)
- Turn on the TV built into the left wall. (8)
- Move the top box (on the floor, between the rows of shelves).
- Get the Rusty Clown doll from the bottom box. (1)
- Get the stacking ring ("ring toss ring") that's hanging on the wall under all the plastic weapons. (1)
- Get the "key to Rusty's back room" taped to the column at the right of the mask shelves. (1)
- Use the key on the "Employees Only" door. (3)
- Open the door and go into Rusty's back room. (1)
- Get the suction dart from the back wall. (1)
- Get the balloon from the left sink. (1)
- Open the barrel of toxic chemicals. (8)
 - * Triggers FLICK.
- · Leave Rusty's back room.
- Travel to the ACME warehouse.

Warehouse

- Open inventory and combine the batteries with the Rusty Doll to create a live Rusty doll. (1)
- Use the live Rusty doll on the pulley hook. (1)
- Hide behind the crate.



- * Triggers FLICK: Flemm enters warehouse, leaves keys and bracelet on the table, sees Rusty doll, runs off.
- Get Flemm's keys from the table. (1)
- Get the bracelet from the table. (11)
- Use Flemm's keys to open the locked storage compartment. (2)
- Get the strongbox from the storage compartment. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the "key from alley" with the strongbox to create an unlocked strongbox. (1)
- Examine the unlocked strongbox (to open it and get the jade). (1)
- Exit the warehouse.

BRIDGE FLICK #1: Watch Percival in the castle with the Chameleon, talking about "hiring" Tex.



DAY TWO

Tex's Office

- Get the Electronics Shop credit card from the mail delivery. (2)
- Go to the Electronics Shop.

Electronics Shop

- Use the credit card on the Electronics Shop door. (2)
- Enter and talk to Hamm.
- Look at the Blue Light Special Box. (2)
- Use the credit card on the Blue Light Special Box. (1)
- Get the fax machine. (4)
- Travel to Tex's office.

Tex's Office

- Go to the fax machine and get the fax from Countess Renier. (1)
- Examine the fax. (1)
- Travel to the Countess' Mansion.

Mansion

- Your trip to the mansion triggers a lengthy flick. (2)
 - * Tex converses with the Countess and gets info about the statuette.
- Travel to the street on Chandler Avenue.

Street

Go to Chelsee's newsstand.



Newsstand

- · Talk to Chelsee.
- Ask about the statuette (to add Franco Franco to your Ask About list). (3)
- Travel to the police station. (1)

Police Station

- · Talk to Mac.
- Ask about Franco Franco (to add Jade to your Ask About list). (1)
- Travel to Chandler Avenue, Rook's Pawnshop. (1)

Pawnshop

- Ask Rook about Franco Franco, then about jade. You'll get info on the trade paper he just thrown out. (1)
- Exit to the alley.

Alley

- Open the "Recyclable Papers Only" garbage can.
- Get the Jewelry Weekly trade paper from the garbage can. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the trade paper; read Franco's ad for jade and see his Alhambra Theatre location. (1)
- Travel to the Alhambra Theater. (12)

Alhambra Theater

- Talk to Franco.
- Offer Franco the jade. (8)
- DON'T GET GREEDY! Ask about the mysterious artifact (to get *Eddie Ching's name*). (16)
- Travel to Tex's office.



Tex's Office

- Get the fax from Franco. (1)
- Examine the fax to get info on the *Knickerbocker*. (1)
- Travel to the police station.

Police Station

- Ask Mac about the Knickerbocker to get the Knickerbocker destination on your travel map. (8)
- Travel to the Electronics Shop on Chandler Avenue.

Electronics Shop

- Talk to Hamm, using dialogue path C, C, B, A to get info on *Knickerbocker* and the *laserblade*. (2)
- Use the credit card on the Blue Light Special Box. (1)
- Get the laserblade. (1)
- Travel to the Knickerbocker. (10)
 - * Triggers two FLICKs: Tex's speeder lands on the Knickerbocker roof; the laserblade cuts through the glass window.

Library (Knickerbocker)

- Get the book on top of the bookcase; it's entitled *Behind the Looking Glass*. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the book to get "Eddie Ching's key" (to the secret room switch). (1)
- Open the Closet door (on the left). (1)
- Get the trap. (1)
- Get the fish food.
- Open the aquarium. (1)



- Use the fish food on the aquarium. (6)
- Open the Hallway door (on the right) and exit the room.

Hallway

- Look at the lasernets, and note the power box at the end of the Hallway. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the suction dart with the crossbow to create a loaded crossbow. (1)
- Use the loaded crossbow on the switchbox. (2)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex loads, shoots crossbow, then follow the dart in flight.
- DON'T TRY THE RING TOSS YET! Go back into the Library first.

Library

- Use the stacking ring on the aquarium (and not on the fish) to create filled ring. (1)
- · Go back into the Hallway.

Hallway

- Use the filled ring on the lever in the switch box. (10)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex tosses the ring.
- Go into the Study (only door on the left).

Study

- Look at the geigger tank. (1)
- Get the capture noose. (1)
- Get the geigger chow from behind the left marble obelisk. (1)



- Open inventory and combine the geigger chow with the trap to create a baited geigger trap. (1)
- Use the baited trap on the terrarium door (to get the geigger). (8)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Geigger gets caught in the trap.
- Move the "nudity" painting to explose the safe. (2)
- Look at the safe.
- Get the birthday fax from the floor. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the birthday fax to get Ching's "birth date" since Ching is 30 years old on 10-14-42, he was born on 10-14-12. (It's actually the safe combination.) (1)
- "Open" the safe to get the digital combination control. (1)
- Enter the combination (101412) in the safe, then click the Enter button; it will open automatically. (1)
- Get the security card (for the laser beams in the Secret Room). (1)
- Get the list of bidders interested in getting the statuette.
- Open inventory and examine the list to add Percival to your Ask About list. (4)
- Move the mirror. (1)
- Use Eddie Ching's key on the switch lock. (1)
- Go back into the library, then go into the Secret Room. (9)

Secret Room

- Look at the statuette in the laser cage. (1)
- Get the bandana from the statue of David.
- Use the bandana on the sign above the lever on the side of the display case. (6)

Note: Save your game before you try this next step! (EXTRA) If you pull the lever on the hermetic chamber lever sign, you'll have fun but lose points.



- Move the middle-right painting to expose the security card slot. (1)
- Use the security card on the slot to shut off laser beams. (1)
- Move the empty crate (nearest the statuette). (1)
- Use the capture noose on the statuette. (9)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex uses the capture noose on the statuette.
- · Travel back to Tex's office.

BRIDGE FLICK #2: Tex gets jumped by the Chameleon.



DAY THREE

Tex's Office

 Exit and go to Slice O' Heaven (the "Pizza Bar" just past the Auto-Postbox). (1)

Slice O' Heaven

- · Talk to Francesca.
- Get Case #3 getting the dirt on Sal.
- Open inventory and examine the note. (2)
- Go to the Brew & Stew. (1)

Brew & Stew

- Ask Louie about Sal to find out about the note scraps. (1)
- End the conversation. Tex automatically exits to the street.

Street

- Open the trash can at the side of Brew & Stew. (2)
- Get the note scraps. (2)
- Open inventory and examine the note scraps.
- In inventory: Assemble the note scraps. (2)
- In inventory: Decipher the cryptogram. Here's the code:

Z = A

J = B

S = C

G = D

V = E



- K = F
- C = G
- U = H
- W = I
- O = L
- H = M
- A = N
- I = O
- E = P
- B = R
- X = S
- L = T
- P = U
- N = V
- Y = W
- R = Y
- (If you still have trouble, or happen to be impatient, we suggest you seek some form of counseling . . . and here's the decoded message:
 "WE HAVE CONFIRMED YOUR APPOINTMENT WITH CHASTITY AT THE SUITE IN THE GOLDEN GATE HOTEL AT THE USUAL TIME. THE PASSWORD TODAY IS SILICON.")
- Go into the Golden Gate Hotel.

Golden Gate Hotel (Lobby)

- Talk to Ardo to learn about his love for *Inspector Burns*.
- End the conversation and go to Rusty's Fun House.



Rusty's Fun House

- Find the helium nozzle; it's in the mouth of the big clown face painted on the left wall. (1)
- Use the balloon on the nozzle to make a helium-filled balloon. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the Inspector Burns mask with the fireman's uniform to create an Inspector Burns disguise. (1)
- Go back to the Golden Gate Hotel.

Golden Gate Hotel (Lobby)

Disguised as Inspector Burns, talk to Ardo. (Be as nice as possible —
try dialog path A, A — bluffing with the disguise to get into the
hotel.)

Hotel Hallway (Outside Suite)

• Enter the "SILICON" password. (26)

Hotel Suite (Main Room)

- Get the gold foil from the table on the left. (1)
- Move yellow painting (far wall, right side) to expose list.
- Look at list of "Sal's Conquests." (4)
- Move "Mishap on the High Seas" painting (left wall, second from far end) to expose the Twistee Game compartment.
- Look at Twistee game box. (4)
- Open the French doors to the Piano Room (right wall) and enter.

Piano Room

- Play (using Move) the piano.
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex plays the piano. (6)



- Get the deodorizer magnet next to the Tudor window. (1)
- Go back into the Main Room, then into the Bedroom.

Hotel Suite Bedroom

- Look at the locked desk drawer (upper left). (1)
- Open middle desk drawer, left side, and look at the Gideon's Bible.
- · Open bottom desk drawer, left side.
- Look at camera. (4)
- Open top desk drawer, right side, and look at 12 cents.
- Open the left nightstand cabinet.
- Look at *Playbub Magazine*. (4)
- Open closet doors. (1)
- Get champagne glass. (1)
- Go back into the suite's Main Room, then open the French doors to the Jacuzzi Room and enter.

Golden Gate Hotel Jacuzzi Room

- Look at the mounted vase (to see the champagne cork). (1)
- Use the champagne glass in the hot tub (to create a filled glass). (1)
- Use the filled champagne glass on the mounted vase. (11)
 - * TRIGGERS FLICK: Tex uses glass to fill vase, then gets the champagne cork.
- Open inventory and examine the champagne cork to get the wire. (1)
- Go back to the Bedroom.



Golden Gate Hotel Bedroom

- Use the wire on the locked desk drawer. (6)
- Get the shoelace. (1)
- Go to the Jacuzzi Room.

Golden Gate Hotel Jacuzzi Room

- Move the towel to expose the drain. (1)
- Look at the drain. (2)
- Open inventory and combine the shoelace with the magnet to create a magnet-on-a-string. (1)
- Use the magnet-on-a-string on the screwdriver to get the screwdriver.
 (1)
- Use the screwdriver on the drain. (1)
- Get the roll of film. (9)
- · Go back into the Main Room.

Suite Main Room

- Exit the room.
 - * Tex automatically leaves the hotel.

Street

• Use your credit card on the Electronics Shop door, then enter.

Electronics Shop

- Use your credit card on the Blue Light Special Box.
- Get the PhotoMatic Pro film developing kit. (2)
- Open inventory and combine the film with the developing kit to get some incriminating photos of Sal. (16)



- (BONUS) In inventory: Look at the incriminating photos. (4)
- · Travel to Slice O' Heaven.

Slice O' Heaven

- Offer the incriminating photos of Sal to Francesca.
- Ask Francesca about the mugging (to get Pug added to your Ask About list). (4)
- Go to Coit Tower. (1)

Coit Tower

- Ask Beek about Pug to discover his location. (4)
- End the conversation; Tex goes directly to Pug's alley. (1)

Pug's Alley

- Talk to Pug to get information on the Colonel. (1)
- Travel to the Colonel's Office. (11)

Colonel's Office

- * FLICK: Tex talks to the Colonel, takes him to the hospital, returns to his office.
- · Talk to Eddie Ching.
- * FLICK: Eddie Ching and his goons nab Tex, knock him out.

BRIDGE FLICK #3: Watch Chameleon and Percival in the Castle as they refer to the Colonel and the "Winter Chip."



DAY FOUR

Tex's Office

• Travel to the Mansion. (5)

Mansion

- Look at the bird on the chandelier. (2)
- Get the watch on top of the fireplace mantel. (2)
- Open inventory and examine the watch to find the secret compartment. (1)
- Use the gold foil on the bird. (1)
 - * Triggers Flick: The bird drops the pack, gets the foil, and flies off.
- Get the cigarette case. (8)
- Open inventory and examine the cigarette case to get a cigarette. (1)
- Move the newspaper (obituary section of *Standard Examiner*) in front of the table to reveal the ashtray.
- Look at the ashtray to see the cigarette butts. (This verifies it's the same type of fancy cigarette that you found in the case.) (6)
- Look in the wastebasket.
- Get the note scraps. (2)
- Open inventory and examine the note pieces.
- Assemble the note pieces to reveal the following partial note (ellipses indicate missing segments):
 - ... circumstances— ... s are progressing smoothly ... delighted to hear that Murphy was able ... the final piece of our puzzle. He probably doesn't ... we repaid him by not killing him immediately.... he gets too nosy, don't be afraid to deal with ... meantime, go to the Bastion of Sanctity and
- Travel to the Colonel's Office. (2)



Colonel's Office

- Move the picture frame on the table. (1)
- Look at the photo of Melahn. (2)
- Open the bottom desk drawer, left side. (1)
- Get the greeting card. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the greeting card . (1)
- Open the bottom desk drawer, right side. (1)
- Get the envelope. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the envelope (to get Melahn's address).
 (5)
- Move the vase in the lower-right corner of the display case to reveal the disk. (1)
- Get the emergency disk (on the vase). (1)
- Turn on the computer. (1)
- Use the emergency disk on the computer, then read all the info. (1)
- Travel to Melahn Tode's. (3)

Melahn Tode's

- Talk to Melahn. (Don't hit on her too hard, or she'll shut you out.)
- Offer the greeting card to Melahn. (6)
- Ask about the Colonel (to get the Colonel's key added to your Ask About list). (1)
- Ask about the Colonel's key to get the key it opens the file cabinet at the Colonel's Office. (1)
- For fun, ask about Chameleon.
- End the conversation and travel back to the Colonel's Office.

Colonel's Office

• Use the Colonel's key on the file cabinet. (1)



- Open the top drawer and get the coded documents. (2)
- Open inventory and examine the coded documents.
- Move the magazine on the floor to reveal the UPEX receipt. (1)
- Get the UPEX receipt. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the UPEX receipt to get Melahn's address. (1)
- Travel back to Melahn Tode. (1)

Melahn Tode's

- · Talk to Melahn.
- Offer (or ask about) the UPEX receipt to get the paper with the combination. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the paper with numbers "5-7-1." (1)
- End the conversation and travel back to the Colonel's Office.

Colonel's Office

- Move the "Air Force" painting to expose the safe. (1)
- Remember the combination: 5-7-1.
- Move the safe's left knob clockwise five ticks.
- Move the safe's center knob clockwise seven ticks.
- Move the safe's right knob clockwise one tick. (5)
- When the safe door opens automatically, get the code book. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the code book with the coded documents to create decoded files. (10)
- In inventory: Examine the decoded files to get the Motel destination and G. R. S. information. (16)
- Travel to the Motel.

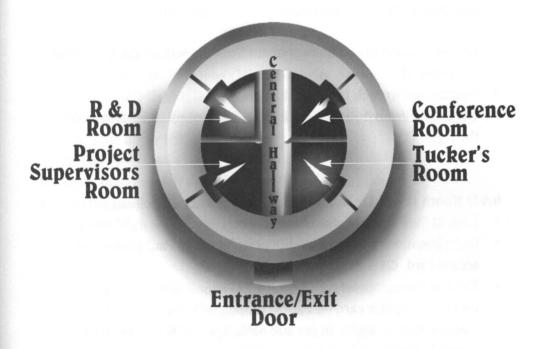
Roadside Motel



- Talk to Alaynah to get the passkey, and info on G. R. S.. (4)
- Travel to G. R. S. (1)

G. R. S.

• Tex automatically uses the passkey to enter.



G. R. S. Hallway

- Run from the security eye (*i.e.*, run away); run left around the curving hallway to the second door on the right: "Research & Development."
- Open the R&D Room door and enter.



R&D Room

• Hide in the back right corner from the security eye. (1)

Note: You need to get between Paul DuBois' desk and the wall, then, still in Movement mode, press and hold the Ctrl key until you've crouched down as low as possible.

Warning! Security sweeps will occur periodically. If you get caught in one, repeat the above procedure.

- Get the San Francisco Stars pennant from the wall on the left side of the room. (1)
- Get the hex wrench from the floor (middle of room). (1)
- Get the TV from desktop (behind the desk lamp) of the first desk on the right. (1)

R&D Room (Paul DuBois Area)

- Look at Paul DuBois' computer. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the pennant to get Paul's computer access card. (2)
- Turn on the computer. (1)
- · Use the computer card on Paul's computer.
- Click on various topics to get info on G.R.S., the Brotherhood, the Secret Doctrine, and other topics. (22)
- Open the door and go back into the Hallway.

Hallway

• Go left to the Project Supervisor's Room, open the door, and enter.



Project Supervisor's Room

- Hide from the security eye behind the partition wall in the back corner.
 (Again, be sure to press & hold the Ctrl key in Movement mode until you get down as low as possible.) (1)
- Use the wrench on the vent plate in the door to the High Security Area. (1)
- Use the geigger on the vent opening. (12)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Geigger goes for sandwich, trips the button to open the door, and gets fried.

Project Supervisor's Room (High Security Area)

- Get the mini-disk on the far desk. (1)
- Look at the note under the mini-disk for info on Eva Schanzee. (8)
- Open the upper left desk drawer.
- Get the laserdisc. (1)
- Open the lower left desk drawer. (1)
- Get the passkey to Tucker's Office. (1)
- Exit the High Security Area and go to Eva Schanzee's desk.

Project Supervisor's Room (Eva Schanzee Area)

- Look at Eva Schanzee's computer.
- Crouch down and look up under Eva's desk (right side) to see her computer access card.
- Get the computer card from under Eva's desk. (1)
- Turn on the computer. (1)
- Use Eva's computer card on the computer. (1)
- Use the mini-disk on the computer. (28)
 - * Triggers FLICK: View Eva's personal logs on the computer.
- Open the door to the Hallway.



Hallway

• Listen and watch for the Security Eye, then hurry around the curving hallway to the Conference Room, open the door, and enter. (1)

Conference Room

- Hide behind the single desk from the security eye. (Again, be sure to press & hold the Ctrl key until you get down as low as possible.)
- Look at the video screen. (1)
- Open the top-left desk drawer and look at the Playbub Magazine. (4)
- Open the bottom-left desk drawer. (1)
- Get the laserdisc player. (1)
- Exit the Conference room into the Hallway and take a right. The next room down is Marcus Tucker's office.

Hallway

- Look at the access panel by the door to Tucker's office. (1)
- Use the passkey on the access panel. (7)
- Open Tucker's office door. (1)
- Enter Tucker's office. (2)

Tucker's Office

- Hide from the security eye by ducking behind the plants. (Again, be sure to press & hold the Ctrl key until you crouch down as low as possible.) (1)
- Look at Tucker's safe the big door across the room from the entrance/exit door. (1)



- Look at Tucker's safe access panel. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the laserdisc player with the TV to create audio-visual equipment. (1)
- In inventory: Combine the laserdisc with the audio-visual equipment to create loaded A/V equipment. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the loaded A/V equipment to see that Marcus Tucker is recorded on the laserdisc.
- Open the lower left drawer. (1)
- Read the number (142235) on the masking tape. (1)
- Open the lower right drawer and get the match. (1)
- · Turn on the safe access panel.
- Use the loaded AV equipment on the access panel (for voice recognition). (14)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Marcus Tucker appears on the TV screen.
- · Go into Tucker's safe.

Tucker's Safe

- Get the Anti-Genesis videocassette. (2)
- Get Eva's buddha. (1)
- Look in the wastebasket and get the note shreds. (1)
- Exit the safe.

Tucker's Office

- Hide from the security eye behind the plant again.
- Wait for the security eye to enter the safe.
- Click on the safe access panel, activate the ON/OFF cursor, then click again to close the door and trap the security eye in the safe. (20)
- Open inventory and examine Eva's buddha to get the Winter Chip. (1)



- In inventory: Combine the Winter Chip with the watch to create a watch with hidden chip. (7)
- In inventory: Assemble the note shreds. (13)
- In inventory: Examine the assembled note (to get the Bastion destination). Here's the full text of the note:

Brother Marcus:

We are seekers of purity who will abide no defect in spirit or form. The time is close at hand—your work was exemplary and adhered in every detail to the holy prophecies. Now that we have the sacred relic in our possession, our plans can be carried out.

I regret that you had to eliminate DuBois. Alas, such is the folly of man. Schanzee is being held on the Moon Child and will pay dearly for her treachery. Also, as feared, Brother Thaniel was not genetically suitable for our Order and had to be retired.

Now your instructions. Go to the Bastion of Sanctity (Long: 122 degrees 47' ll", Latit: 41 degrees 28' 6"). Upon arriving, the Chameleon will provide transport, though he will not travel with you to the Moon Child just now, as he has other business to attend to before joining us.

Godspeed Brother.

• Go into the Hallway, then back to the Project Supervisor's Room.

Project Supervisor's Room

- Look at the wall safe. (1)
- "Open" the safe to get the access panel.



- Enter the number code you got from Tucker's desk (142235) on the access panel, then click the Enter button. (12)
- Open the safe and get the viral powder. (1)
- Exit the room into the Hallway.

Hallway

• Go to the Conference Room and open the door.

Conference Room

- Get the cabinet door key from the ledge running along the wall to the left as you enter. (1)
 - * Hint: The key is under the photo portrait of the guy about whom Murphy says: "He'll sell no wine before it's time."
- Use the cabinet door key on the middle of the console. (1)
- Look at the VCR. (1)
- Turn on the VCR. (1)
- Use the videocassette on the VCR. (1)
- Turn on the remote pad on the conference table, then watch the video of the virus. (28)
- Travel back to Tex's Office.

BRIDGE FLICK #4: Alaynah is kidnapped by Chameleon, who appears in a cube message to Tex.



DAY FIVE

Tex's Office

• Travel to the Bastion. (1)

Bastion Entrance

- Look at Chameleon. (1)
- Look at Alaynah. (1)
- DON'T ENTER THE MAIN ROOM! Chameleon will kill you. Instead,
 take the passageway to the right just before the entrance into the main room.

Bastion Passageway

- Get the clamp stuck on the coat of arms (right wall). (1)
- Continue down the passage to the alcove on the right, then look at the expensive vase on the shelf. (1)
- Get the gargoyle's eye (gemstone). (1)
- Continue further and get the bunjee cord (left wall). (1)
- Return to the alcove, then open inventory and combine the clamp with the bunjee cord to create a slingshot. (1)
- In inventory: Combine the slingshot with the gemstone to create a loaded slingshot. (1)
- Use the loaded slingshot on the vase. (10)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex shoots the slingshot at the vase, which falls.
- Hurry now ... Chameleon is coming to investigate.
- In inventory: Combine the cigarette with the viral powder (to create a lethal cigarette). (1)



- In inventory: Combine the lethal cigarette with the match (to create a lit lethal cigarette). (11)
- Hurry around the passage and out into the main room.

Main Room

- Use the lit lethal cigarette on Chameleon's cigarette, which sits in the ashtray on the table. (1)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex goes to the Main Room, switches cigarettes, etc. Chameleon smokes, falls, Tex enters, Chameleon dies.
- Move the shield on the right wall to expose a switch. (1)
- Turn off the switch to remove the force field. (5)
- · Talk to Alaynah.
- Find out about Ferrel Pus and the Broken Skull. (1)
 - * Tex describes returning Alaynah to her motel, and his own return to the Broken Skull.
 - * A \$100 bill is automatically added to inventory.
- After the Poe reading, travel to The Broken Skull. (2)

The Broken Skull

- Talk to the bartender and use dialogue path B, C, B. (1)
- Offer her the \$100 bill. (1)
- Choose response attitude A or B (but *not* C). (2)
- When the bartender asks about the token, choose response B. (1)
- Travel to the Roadside Motel. (1)

Motel

 Ask Alaynah about the token to get Silver Dollar added to your Ask About list. (1)



 End the conversation and travel to Rook's Pawnshop on Chandler Avenue. (1)

Pawnshop

- Ask Rook about the silver dollar (to get the silver dollar). (6)
- Travel back to the Broken Skull. (1)

Broken Skull

- Talk to the bartender and choose response attitude A or B. (1)
- Offer the silver dollar. (9)
 - * Tex is automatically taken to the Ferrellette Room.

Ferrellette Room

• Talk to Ferrel Pus. (1)

Ferrellette Game

- Round 1: Choose the ball in the northeast position. (1)
- Round 2: Choose the ball in the center position. (1)
- Round 3: Choose the ball in the south position. (1)
- Round 4: Choose the ball in the south position. (1)
 - * Tex wins and automatically returns to the bar. (6)

The Broken Skull

- · Talk to the bartender.
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex is slipped a mickey, and the screen fades to black.

BRIDGE FLICK #5: View the prophecy reading at the cult meeting on Moon Child.



DAY SIX

Note: Day Six will open with a death sequence if Tex didn't hide the Winter Chip in the watch back on Day Four.

Arboretum

- After Lowell Percival appears on the cube, look at the door. (1)
- Look at the smoke alarm above the door. (1)
- Look at the pile of leaves on the ground. (1)
- Find and open the closet door. (1)

Closet

- Get the lighter fluid. (1)
- Find and get the rake. (1)

Arboretum

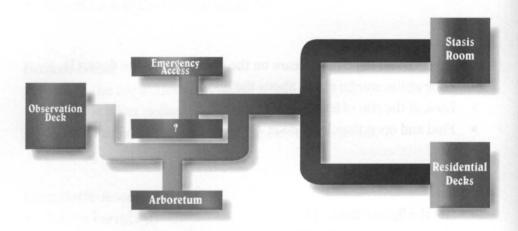
- Find and get the piece of flint from the entrance, go all the way around to the far windows which look out on Earth. Then look on top of the rock wall to the right, at the end closest to the windows. (1)
- Find and get the stone from the entrance, go toward the stone cube sculpture, then turn left. Look for the loose stone in the rightside rock wall. (1)
- Use the rake on the leaves on the floor by the door to create a "hidden-rake booby trap." (1)
- Use the lighter fluid on the leaves that hide the rake. (1)
- Open inventory and combine the flint with the stone to create sparks. (1)



- Start a fire by using the sparks on the leaves that hide the rake. (11)
 - * Triggers FLICK: Smoke billows, Tex yells "Fire!" The guard enters and steps on the rake. Tex goes into the Moon Child Hallway

Moon Child Hallway

• Find and look at the Stasis Room door. (1) (See Map above.)



- · Open the door and enter.
 - * Triggers FLICK: Tex finds Eva, who is in stasis.
- Turn on the Stasis Console.

Now Tex needs to revive Eva in the following three phases:

Stasis Reversal: Phase 1

- At the Stasis Console: Move the slider for Stasis Chamber Temperature to 58 degrees (until the red box lights up under the Phase 1 Complete indicator).
- Move the slider for Oxygen Level to 12%.
- Push the Epinephrine (Adrenaline) button.
- Push the Electric Shock button "Phase 1 complete."



Stasis Reversal: Phase 2

- Move the slider for Stasis Chamber Temperature to 86 degrees.
- Push the Sodium Pentathol (NaC11H18N202S) button.
- Push the Epinephrine button.
- Move the slider for Oxygen Level to 14% "Phase 2 complete."

Stasis Reversal: Phase 3

- Move the slider for Stasis Chamber Temperature to 98.6 degrees.
- Move the slider for Oxygen Level to 16%.
- Push the Epinephrine button.
- Push the Sodium Bicarbonate (NaHCO3) button.
 - * Triggers series of FLICKS: Eva awakens. Tex talks to her and gets the mission paper with plan information as well as Eva's key. (30)

Moon Child Hallway

- Open inventory and examine the mission paper. (3)
- Find the Observatory. (See the map.)
- Open the door to the Observation Deck and enter.

Observation Deck

- Use Eva's key on the wall panel door. (2)
- Move the Links 986 box to expose the mini-computer. (1)
- Get the mini-computer. (6)
- Move the potted plant in the far corner to expose the floor panel. (1)
- Look at the floor panel. (1)
- · Go back into the Moon Child Hallway.



Moon Child Hallway

- Get the pipe laying in front of the Residential Decks door. (See map.) (1)
- Go back into the Observatory.

Observatory

- Use the pipe on the floor panel to open it. (1)
- Get the computer cable. (7)
- Get the cocktail glass from the table. (1)
- Open inventory and examine the cocktail glass to get the flex-straw.
 (1)
- Find and look at the recessed button on the wall next to the door. (1)
- Use the flex-straw on the recessed button. (5)
 - * A panel slides open, revealing a computer.
- In inventory: Combine the linkup computer with the Winter Chip to create a computer virus link-up. (1)
- In inventory: Combine the computer virus link-up with the computer cord to create a virus link-up connection. (1)

Observatory Computer

- Use the computer viral link-up connection on the wall console. (9)
 - * Triggers FINAL FLICK: Watch the Moon Child explode, then view the story finale.

TOTAL = 1003 points



Interviews with Chris Jones and Aaron Conners, Creators of Under a Killing Moon



Interview with Chris Jones (and Steve Witzel)

When I first met the *Under a Killing Moon* creative team, the first question that came to mind was, "Do these guys have a corporate basketball team?" Chris Jones is Tex Murphy's creator and alter ego, and he's at least 6'4". Aaron Conners, who wrote the script for the game, stands about 6'3". Both are rangy and athletic-looking and seem capable of establishing a solid presence in the low post.

Accompanied by Steve Witzel, Access VP of marketing, I met Chris Jones in his spacious office at Access headquarters in Salt Lake City. At first glance, Jones looks quite

different from Tex — no scruffy beard growth, no trenchcoat or hat ... in fact, no seedy aura whatsoever. I was almost disappointed. But the voice ... there was no mistaking Tex Murphy's low, sarcastic drawl.

Since Jones created Tex Murphy — and *is* Tex Murphy — he sits poised on the verge of multimedia superstardom. But there was no trace of an ego problem. In fact, I was struck by his generous use of the first-person plural pronoun in describing the development of *Under a Killing Moon*. "We decided" … "we developed the script" … "we faced technology limitations" … "we wanted that classic feel" … etc. Indeed, he seemed more than willing to share the success with his teammates, unlike a lot of other tall guys who can post up and dunk on you.





Jones, by the way, doesn't play basketball ... although there is an amusing basketball sequence in the game. He is, however, a film nut of the first rank. Indeed, his fondness for such classics as *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca* formed the basis of his creation of Tex Murphy and Tex's world.

Rick Barba: I know your main character has a history — *Under a Killing Moon* is his third adventure — so let's go back to the "birth" of Tex Murphy.

Chris Jones: The original concept for the Tex Murphy series ... well, I go way back with a lot of the guys that work here. I mean, these are people I've known since I was seven or eight years old. When we were kids, we used to love to make movies. It's just something we've done off and on for the past 30 years.

Back in 1988 or 89 we were tossing around the idea of putting together another film ... an ambitious, massive project, which we saw as our last shot at putting a film together. Of course, this was before we realized what we could do in our interactive computer games. Anyway, we came up with this character called Tex Murphy, a twenty-first century detective, a haphazard, clumsy type of guy who was able to solve cases in spite of himself. So we spent a lot of time working on the script, got a lot of people involved, and had a lot of fun.

But while developing the movie, we still had a project called *Echelon* on our minds, a flight sim game we'd recently completed for Access. We started getting new game ideas like, "Wouldn't it be great to combine a flight simulator with an adventure so that you did more than just fly from point A to point B?" Eventually, we did shoot our movie, it turned out to be a disaster. (laughs) But this Tex Murphy character soon began to get incorporated into a computer flight simulator. It became *Mean Streets*, a flight simulator and adventure game put together.



CJ: People were more interested in Tex Murphy and his story than they were in the flight simulator. At that time, it seemed *everybody* was trying to blend different genres together. But the information we got back was, "Forget the flight simulator. Concentrate on the character." Two years later we released the next Tex Murphy adventure, *Martian Memorandum*, and its success led us to realize we had something good with Tex.

RB: So now you were hooked on PC adventure games. Did it feel like a suitable substitute for your movie making aspirations?

CJ: Not quite yet. I mean, we faced technology limitations — you couldn't make the characters *talk* for very long, so it got a little repetitive. But people really liked the style and the character we'd developed, this twenty-first century detective with all the elements of the 1930's and 40's. You know, if you sit and wonder what the world will be like in 40-50 years ... (laughs) ... hey, we sit and watch *Thin Man* and Bogart movies, and those wartime styles and clothes aren't all that different from what people wear now. That 1940's essence is what we carried forward into the future, and I think the blending works quite well.

RB: Were you influenced by *Bladerunner* at all?

CJ: Yeah, we were. I love *Bladerunner*, I love that feel. But really, *Bladerunner* is all style and not too much substance. So when we looked at it, we thought we could make our story more in-depth. We wanted to take elements of *The Big Sleep* and *The Maltese Falcon* and then mix in some futuristic gadgets, but keep the essence and the flavor there.

That's what people really like about detective stories, isn't it? That classic *feel*, that core. But we thought we could do a better job than *Bladerunner* in building a plausible, thick, rich story around it. That was really the key for us ... we wanted the gadgets, but we also wanted the



classic feel. We were extremely conscious of that, and I think we ended up with a pretty honest mix.

RB: Did the story in *Under a Killing Moon* naturally flow from the previous two Tex Murphy titles, or did you reexamine the nature of the character?

CJ: When we finished *Martian Memorandum* ... well, OK, we had done *Mean Streets* and *Countdown*, and then we went on to *Amazon*, and then we looked back. We saw that the most successful products were the Tex Murphy stories. So we decided on another Tex Murphy, but we didn't want to be in the pack anymore, with all the other adventure games. Access had tremendous success with *Links* and *Links 386*, setting industry standards, making what was widely acclaimed as the best product in the golf category. So we decided we wanted to be the *Links 386* of adventure games.

Our attitude then was, "Let's take the blinds off." Anything that we want to do, we'll consider it. No preconceptions about what an adventure game is, no limitations ... just assume *everything*'s available to us. So now ... what would make a great adventure game? We want to pull away from everyone else.

Remember now, this was two years ago. CD-ROM was still a dream, it was just beginning to happen. Disk-based products were where all the sales were at. But even back then, we decided that there would not even *be* a disk-based version of this game.

RB: Of course, now you look like a genius because of that decision. The PC sales leader board is suddenly dominated by CD-ROM titles — *Myst*, *The 7th Guest, Rebel Assault, Return to Zork*. But back then it was an awfully gutsy move. Two years ago everybody thought CD-ROM was still five years off, mass-market-wise.

CJ: That's really been our philosophy all along. With Links 386, for



example, Steve [Witzel] really influenced that decision back at a time when the 386 machines were just released. He said, "Let's not look at what's hot right now, but at what's going to be hot in the future." We want to push the top technology, because we think those buyers are most interested in seeing something exciting. We want to be at the top end of development, we want to turn out something very special. And as we were considering our new Tex Murphy adventure, it seemed the only way to go was CD-ROM, there's no other way.

RB: The few companies that really took the plunge with CD-ROM have done quite well. It takes a lot of intelligent market research and gut feeling to go in the right direction with a particular format and just assume, "If you build it, they will come."

Steve Witzel: Well, we spend a lot of time looking at engineering journals around here. We like to see what's going on before it hits the computer presses. If you watch the journals closely, you can see where the technology waves are coming. It's been a good indicator for us over the years, to see where the systems are moving.

Chris Jones: That's the difference between Access and other companies. Steve's an engineer, and so is the president of the company, Bruce Carver. So their natural instincts are towards new and exciting things. They like to tinker. For them, engineering is at the heart of market success. We want the new stuff, then we'll make something exciting with it ... as opposed to the more promotional aspects of marketing. You know, "Can we get Michael Jordan in here and crank out some game with his name on it?" (laughs) For us, it's, "Let's get the hot new technology and see how creative we can be with it."

For me, since I was always interested in the movies, this new technology was the first time I could look at computer gaming and say, "Now I can do what I really want to do." I can finally take all these cinematic elements, all these elements that make an exciting movie, transfer



them into an interactive situation, and make something that's really special.

RB: OK, so you had Tex Murphy, you had your moviemaking dream, you had the CD-ROM platform, and you had a company that values cutting edge development with new technologies. So it was all systems go at that point?

CJ: You got it.

RB: So now let's talk about the actual process of making *Under a Killing Moon*. How did you get started?

CJ: When we were still doing *Amazon* we brought in Aaron Conners. His background was English literature, and he had some good writing experience. But best of all, he loves to develop murder mysteries. I mean, he puts together murder mystery parties, these things with really complex structures. And he's been doing this as long as I've been making movies. It's just something he loves.

So I said, "OK, Aaron, let's take a shot, go ahead and develop a story." He spent about three months working on it, and came up with something that we liked, with some punch to it. So we had the story in place by November of '92, although it's gone through numerous transformations because ... (laughs) ... when it started out it was so incredibly big.

RB: Bigger than it is now?

CJ: Much bigger. At least twice as big, if not more.



RB: Holy cow. Do we credit Aaron with the original story idea too, or were other people involved in the concept stages?

CJ: Aaron had *great* story ideas. The only problem was he had never really worked on a game before, so his mindset wasn't fully in the interactive mode at first. When you look at a movie, its 2-D, but when you step into a game, it has to be 3-D, in terms of feel and awareness. You're not watching something happen, you're *making* something happen, and you're inside that character's world and mind. So you have to be aware of what he's thinking, what he sees, what's around him, what his options are.

The original scope of Aaron's story was way too big, a gigantic story of epic proportions! We altered a few things, but the story is still probably about 70% his, in terms of all the great stuff we kept. And now Aaron is thinking like a gamer thinks, as opposed to how an author writes a linear story, or how a producer makes a movie. You have to get people involved somehow, you can't just be presenting an "experience" to them.

RB: Can you be more specific about what you mean?

CJ: Well, in particular, the element of *pacing* is entirely different for an interactive computer game than it is for any other medium. How do you keep people involved? How do you provide timely incentives to keep going? Until you get a feel for how players move through an adventure game, your script, no matter how well-written, won't create a satisfying interactive experience.

RB: OK, so you had a fully-fleshed story, but no script yet. What happened next?

CJ: From there we tried to figure out what we wanted to do from a technology standpoint. What would really make this different and exciting,



and how can we take this up to the next level? And so we started looking at all the products that were out there.

At the time we had the first version of *Doom*, which was amazing. I mean, you just *moved* through those corridors, it was three dimensional. It *looked* awful (laughs) but it was exciting the way you really inhabited that space. And it wasn't just polygons, there was some mapping.

Then of course we looked at *The 7th Guest*. The graphics were so good, and when things *moved* the 3-D feel was exciting in a way that we wanted to emulate. But things didn't move *enough* in *The 7th Guest*, it was way too limiting for what we wanted to do. We didn't want to get into the path method. That's kind of where the gaming split has been lately. You've got stuff like *Doom* and the *Ultima* series, where you've got people going down corridors, looks pretty good, VGA, some freedom of movement. Then you have other stuff with no freedom of movement, you go only where they tell you, but it looks fantastic — *The 7th Guest, Myst*, etcetera.

So we said, These are dandy, but these are the two bottoms of the triangle, and we want to go to the top. We've got to have the movement of a *Doom* with the look of *The 7th Guest*. And I have to say that we're very excited by the technology that we've developed. *Very* excited.

RB: How did your programmers feel about your excitement?

CJ: (laughs) We sat down with the engineers and said, "This is what we want, can we do it?" (laughs again) Well, they all said, "Oh *man*, why don't we go back to that little guy walking around on the screen?"

[Author's Note: All previous Access adventure games including *Mean Streets* and *Martian Memorandum* are 3rd-person perspective games, while *Under a Killing Moon* primarily uses a 1st-person perspective.]

But we wanted to create what we called a "virtual world." We wanted players to feel like they've literally stepped into the screen. It's the *Purple Rose of Cairo* idea in reverse — I have to feel I'm an actual partici pant in the virtual world, not just sitting back and watching something on



the screen, not just watching messy images. It has to *look* like the real world. That's why we go to live actors. *At all levels*, this has to feel like a real world situation, so we want to deal with professionalism all the way around.

So we had our concept. Then we hit the delay. It took a lot of months, but finally the first maps started coming in, and we were jumping up and down. Those first few steps looked better than anything we'd *ever* seen in terms of movement in a three-dimensional environment.

Since then the guys have been getting better and better with the tools, until now we have something pretty amazing. I mean, when you can walk anywhere in a room that has the same level of detail as this room we're in right now ... walk up to the walls, read diplomas, examine paintings, that level of definition ... I mean, you're not just looking at big blocky pixels.

RB: It seems pretty unanimous among reviewers that you created a whole new state-of-the-art.

CJ: No doubt about it, this is what game developers will have to do from here on out. Because this is what everybody *wants*. When we sat down to create this experience, we asked ourselves, "If I'm a private investigator, what do I want to do?" Hey, I want to look in drawers! I want to crawl around, look at footprints on the floor, pull things out and examine them! And I want to do all that stuff myself, I want to control the action. I don't want some mouse click to take me to a path over there. Give me all the freedom that you can, then let me interact with that environment.

Steve Witzel: The development process for this technology has been almost unbelievable. I'm out of the office a lot, so every couple of weeks I'd come back in and have a look. And I have to honestly say that I wouldn't just look at the latest piece of the game and say, "Yeah, that's good, that's the way it *should* look." Instead I found myself saying, "Wow! I didn't know we could *do* that!"



RB: OK, so now you've got a story and a technology. What happens next in the process?

CJ: Well, once we finally got over the hump and discovered that, yes, we can do this, these guys know what they're doing ... now what? Well, now we've got to work on the interactive. Because as reviews started coming out on other products, we saw a lot of criticism of the level of player involvement. A lot of the new CD-ROM stuff really *looked* great, but had very weak interactivity — "lots of nice little QuickTime movies, boy, CD's gonna be great someday." (laughs) But in the meantime ... well, we could see what people wanted, and we tried to figure out how to go about doing it.

First, we have characters in the game. Will they be cardboard or will they have some depth? Are we going to give them histories, interesting personalities? Will there be inherent reasons to talk to them? Yeah, of course.

Next, how do we interact with the environment? Well, we wanted objects you could pick up and turn and spin and look at the bottom to find hints and clues ... because, after all, you're a *detective*, right?

RB: So then you began developing scripts for your characters.

CJ: Right, with a standard branching structure — you have three choices, three more, three more. Well, the tree gets pretty big after a while, but we set no limits. Again, the idea was to make these characters interesting, develop some richness to the world. And we wanted it to be funny, fun to play. I mean, with this massive game, you don't want *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* or anything like that. So Aaron did most of the scripts, and they all had the element of humor.

In the course of developing the conversation trees, however, two things came up. Other games would give you a character's dialogue choices as complete blocks of text. So you'd have to read the whole line, *all* the lines, then you pick the one you want, then you listen to the char



acter repeat it again. [He makes a snoring sound.] Man. Aside from being boring, it kind of destroys any sense of pacing. So instead of putting all that text on the screen, we came up with "attitudes" — quick, humorous phrases that sum up the gist of a response without giving you the whole thing. Now you can get a chuckle out of the three "attitude" phrases, then get a fresh new laugh when Tex says his line. That kept the pacing up.

RB: The "attitude" phrase seems like a nice way to give control to the player while keeping responses fresh, like you said. I think about some other games out right now, like *Return to Zork* or *Sam & Max Hit the Road*. I enjoyed both games, but I think both went too far by limiting player response choices to very broad attitudes or categories.

CJ: Exactly. You have to cross that interactive threshold with people, give them that *control*. If you don't ... if people feel like they're just clicking on buttons with only a vague idea of what sort of response they've elicited, then they don't feel really involved, and they get turned off pretty quick. We want players to feel attached to a dialog choice. If you *think* a response is going to be funny, you're primed for a reaction, you get anticipatory laughter ... which is the best set-up, the kind we're after. Then if the response really *is* funny, *bam*, you've got good cinematic pacing.

We think our "attitude" phrases have made a huge difference in the pacing of the game.

RB: At what point in the process did you work out this notion?

CJ: It was fairly early on. Actually, it happened when we shot the first character. We had the full text of your dialogue choices print out on the screen, and it was just too much. If I have to go through and read everything, then listen to it *again* as the character says it ... well, it *hurts*. We wanted something that moves. I mean, today we watched



This Is Amway from 1975. Yeah, we get desperate for films around here. But I have to say that the Amway pacing was comparable to most computer adventure games today.

Here's an important point: With humor, timing is everything. If you have to see dialogue, read it, hear the line in your head, then hear it again as spoken by an actor ... well, forget it. That's not an interactive movie, it's interactive boredom. We wanted something fresh, something lively.

RB: When you looked at your competition — in particular, I'm thinking of *The 7th Guest* — what other aspects of their approach did you find illuminating? For example, did you like the way *The 7th Guest* advances via puzzle-solving sequences that have little if anything to do with the story? (pause) Is this a leading question, or what?

CJ: Hey, not at all.

RB: So what did you think of the way you moved through the game in *The 7th Guest?*

CJ: We didn't like that.

RB: Nobody I know liked that.

CJ: (laughs) Right. So we went for what I call "disguised linearity." Obviously, you have to solve a mystery. You have to do something *here* before you can discover what's going on over *there*. The concept was to give the player a large, engaging world to explore, but to funnel them along to certain "bottleneck" points that further the plot.

We didn't want some huge *SimCity* type of thing, because our goal was to provide an almost movie-like pacing within a classic storytelling



structure, something with a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion. We wanted to create a virtual world, give players the freedom to explore it at their own pace, yet keep them moving forward through the story at an entertaining pace as well.

RB: It sounds almost contradictory — freedom to explore in a linear plotted story.

CJ: Yet any computer gamer familiar with the adventure game genre knows what I mean. You want to be able to explore worlds freely, yet also maintain a sense of purpose, a sense of being propelled to some exciting conclusion. There has to be a series of plot elements that build tension and mystery, increase the excitement, and point the way to a crescendo, a big payoff. Just like in a movie.

RB: Otherwise people feel cheated somehow. We've got an inbred sense of story and pacing that crosses all genres and media.

CJ: Exactly.

RB: You've got such a cinematic sensibility about things. If I can go off on a short tangent here ... I'm just curious about the types of films you made with your friends as you were growing up. I mean, were these *real* films?

CJ: We took them pretty seriously. Most of them were 8 mm, Super-8. We experimented with 16 mm film too. We'd do them for university film festivals, things like that. But you learn what people like, you learn what interests them. You see where you're grabbing their attention, where a lull is.



RB: So prior to making computer game adventures, you'd gone through the whole process of filmmaking, from scripting to acting and shooting, to editing.

CJ: Oh yeah. Special effects, the whole bit. We've done all that conceptually, since I was eleven years old. I've always watched the reactions that audiences have — where am I winning, where am I losing them? Did I build the climax right, or did it die before the end? All of these elements are very important to me.

RB: Did you have any formal training in film? Did you go to film school or anything like that?

CJ: I've taken classes at the university, but it's more just amateur film appreciation. I love all types of movies, but I get a special kick out of the classics. *Casablanca*, *The Big Sleep*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Citizen Kane*. There's something special about these films, and when you strip out all the external stuff, the glamour, the historical context, etcetera ... well, there's a core. I just watch and watch these films and try to figure out what makes them so compelling.

RB: So you don't have any formal training or background in film?

CJ: (smiling) My background is in marketing and finance.

RB: So you've developed your skills by osmosis. Very Spielbergian. The child film junkie becomes self-made filmmaker.

CJ: I see that as the difference, having a true film sensibility. We look at a product like *Quantum Gate* and say, "You can't call that a movie!" That's just *technology*, just somebody *talking* up there. Can't we do something



more to capture the thing that makes a movie compelling and get it into our product?

Now, that's where the actors came in. We couldn't just have some-body up there spouting lines, like you see in most of the current CD-ROM interactive stuff. What is it that pulls you into a story? It's not just somebody talking, it's shadings of mood, atmosphere, feeling, humor. Your characters have to be developed, they really have to act, I have to get a performance ... even at this level.

RB: When did you make the decision to get some professional talent involved in *Under a Killing Moon*?

CJ: After we filmed the first scene. (laughs) We had this local woman do a scene as the Countess character. Of course, a lot of our people are just local stage play people. This woman read the Countess part and we thought, well, this must be going OK. But when we put it in the machine and watched it ... oh man, it seemed like *hours* of footage, though maybe it was only fifteen minutes. It was like, *I'm losing it*, *I'm going to sleep*, *this is the most boring thing I've ever watched in my life!* The whole thing had to be canned, we couldn't use any of it.

So we decided at that point to get professional people in who matched these characters. It's not enough to just throw on a wig and say, "I'm a Countess!"

RB: There's so much of that amateurism in the industry right now. Even some of the good stuff — for example, this year's smash hit *Myst* is basically two brothers doing their own acting and music and art. But most of the CD-ROM acting I've seen is pathetic. It's like hey, let's get the neighbors together and make some multimedia art.

CJ: It's unwatchable. And I admit, we tried it. But it was pretty clear it was going nowhere.



- **RB**: Products like Sierra's *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers* showed everyone how using professional talent can really take things up a few notches. Tim Curry, Mark Hamill and the others they got for that product made it come to life, and that was just voice talent over cartoon people.
- **CJ**: Oh yeah. We wanted to create a virtual world that looked and felt real. But if you walk into this cool alternate reality, then start talking to characters who are obviously fake because they're such bad actors ... well, it totally destroys the magic. So we did a frame by frame cutout. I mean, it's lip-synched perfectly, because we cut out each frame separately. There's almost four hours of video in this game.
- **RB**: I got a tour of Access and saw the blue-screen room where you shot most of the live action stuff in the game. Can you talk a little bit about the technical process you went through in making *Under a Killing Moon*?
- **CJ**: When we started shooting, we weren't too happy with the blue screen, and I think it was because of the lighting. We didn't have enough light initially, and we were getting a lot of halos. So we went to shooting against a black screen, but that had its own problems. Black is cleaner around the edges, getting rid of the halos and such, but it's much more time consuming. When you're cutting out characters frame by frame, blue's more of an automatic process. You can mask it out much easier. You still have to go through and clean up frames, but you don't get all the holes formed when you remove black black hair, eyebrows, dark shadows suddenly disappear when you mask black out of a frame. So we went back to the blue screen and lit it better. That got rid of 99% of the halo problems.

But the *real* key to making the whole thing work was to get our live actors interacting with the virtual environment. Players put up a mental wall between the real human actors and the "fake" digital world, and you need to break down that wall. We tried very hard to get some interaction in every sequence. Characters opening or closing a drawer, walking



behind something, picking up a piece of paper, whatever. If you see a live actor actually manipulate virtual things in the virtual room, you get the suspension of disbelief you want.

I think we blended our real actors into our virtual world very, very well in *Under a Killing Moon*. Check out the scene at the end of Day Two in the Knickerbocker where Tex lifts the crystal bird statuette with the noose. The only thing that actually existed when we shot the sequence was the pole I held.

RB: OK, so you made the decision to go with professional actors. How did you hook up with Margot Kidder, Brian Keith, and Russell Means?

CJ: My brother knows a talent agent named Catrine McGregor. She was casting for a movie shot in Salt Lake City last summer [1993] called *The Stand*. We asked her how to go about getting some of these people, what's the process involved. She gave us good advice, and we started making a wish list of who we might want — you know, Robert Mitchum (laughs), who actually talked to us awhile, but then he said no. We had Darrin McGavin and Brian Keith on this list too.

Catrine just happened to know Margot Kidder, and said she might be able to get Margot interested in our project. We thought that would be very exciting. Of course, none of these people had any concept of what we were trying to do ... I mean, nobody had ever seen it done. They all thought, "Well, I'm going to be this little Nintendo guy walking around a screen, and the work will be all voice-over." No matter how hard we tried to explain, they would still wonder, "OK, but what are you going to *do* to me? Is this really a serious business here?"

Catrine was able to assure Margot that we were legitimate, and that this whole interactive genre is going to be big in the future. And then I think Catrine mentioned VR, and it clicked with Margot. Virtual reality is something *everyone* is excited about, apparently. That hooked Margot, she came in and shot her scenes, and when we showed her what we were doing — the crystal clarity of the image in Super VGA is better than TV,



when you don't have to run it through compression — well, she was absolutely fascinated.

Then, because Margot did it, we were able to go to Brian Keith and say, "You know, we just had Margot Kidder in here!" It was this building process. It took the first one, Margot, to convince everyone we were serious, and then the others jumped in.

RB: Did you have a specific role in mind for Margot Kidder when you signed her?

CJ: No way. (laughs) We had to adapt a role to make it work. We just wanted solid, professional actors. We told Catrine we'd take whoever was good and available. Margot's part was originally written for a man, but we just changed the script a little so it would work.

RB: You probably didn't have to change the script too much.

CJ: (laughs) No, in fact. Margot's part, the bartender, was perfect for her. We changed a couple of things, but she played it pretty straight and tough. She was absolutely great.

Brian Keith, of course, was a perfect choice for the Colonel role. He was on our list from the beginning. He's an old guy now, and you see him for the first time out of makeup and wonder, "Oh man, I hope this works." We shot his scenes, and it seemed good, but it's hard to tell sometimes until you look at the footage. When we did, we saw Brian Keith in the medium we're used to seeing him in, and it was *bingo*. "Oh yeah, *that's* Brian Keith!"

He was absolutely perfect, fantastic. And he'd keep us entertained with all these great stories about the industry. (laughs) Telling us about filming *Arrowhead* in southern Utah with Charlton Heston, telling us about people he likes, people he dislikes. It was a lot of fun.

We were dealing with a level of actor we weren't used to working



with ... I mean, we're used to models who come in, look good, and maybe say one bad line. We'd have to feed them every word, every inflection. "No, no, repeat after me ... say it like *this*." We found out pretty quick that's not how you work with these old-timers. Brian would take the script and go dead serious. You could see the pure intensity on his face. Then he'd deliver the line different than what we envisioned, but *better*. A little different shine on the line, and it would be twenty times better than what I was hearing in my head beforehand.

We'd say, "Hey, you're *good!* Geez, there *is* something to this professional acting thing! We've had models in here who said they were actresses. They weren't! *You're* a real actor, man."

RB: You always hear about "the collaborative process" in Hollywood, but until you see it at work on some level, you don't really understand what it means, I guess. If everybody brings something to the table, the project gets better ... as long as there's some control.

CJ: Right. As long as somebody can keep an overall perspective, and say, "Yeah, that works, in context." The James Earl Jones coup was an example of that too. Here we were lucky enough to get this guy with probably the most recognizable voice in the industry ... and we got him because his son just happens to be an avid CD-ROM gamer.

RB: No kidding? That's how you got him?

CJ: Yeah. We just went out on a limb one day and said, "Wouldn't it be great to have James Earl Jones do some reading in this thing?" Yeah, sure, fat chance. (laughs) But by some miracle, he'd *heard* about *Under a Killing Moon* and he said yeah, sure, I'll do it. Talk about a gracious person. I mean, here's this guy, we don't what to expect, all we know is he's Darth Vader. We're willing to just throw him the lines, let him read any way he wants. And here's this nicest man you could imagine, actually



asking us for some direction on this stuff. Absolutely incredible. Such an experience. He'd try a line a few different ways, then launch into this final, perfect, immaculate reading. Listening to someone of his caliber reading Edgar Allen Poe's "Mask of the Red Death" just sends chills through you.

RB: Did you create the godlike "P. I. in the Sky" just for him?

CJ: Well, we were trying to come up with a creative way to handle the Tex Murphy death scenes. We wanted to elevate this game. We said, "OK, games are cute, games are fun. But we want to get out of this. We want it to have elements of a game, but it must be a true entertainment piece, right up next to movies." I mean, we didn't want to blow off half of Tex's head and throw up a clever line. We wanted to stay true to the classic film tradition that had inspired the project in the first place.

So we thought, "We've got to deal with death, how should we do it?" The answer was "The Great P. I. in the Sky" who tells you how you screwed up, then sends you back. Obviously we needed an authoritative voice, somebody like ... well, James Earl Jones! None of us really believed we could get him. Then when we did, we started scrambling around, trying to figure what else we could have him do. I wanted him to read something more or less classic, whether it was biblical or whatever. Then it occurred to me that our story had a lot of similarities to Poe's "Mask of the Red Death," so we pulled out certain passages that key in to certain plot elements of our story.

His voice carries so much *weight*. I think James Earl Jones gave so much legitimacy to what we were doing that it put more pressure on our shoulders. Keep it at the highest level of entertainment. Pull it away from everything that's been done. This isn't just a *game*.

Steve Witzel: I don't think we view ourselves as a software company. We view ourselves as an entertainment company. Software is just the medium that we've chosen.



RB: So now you've got your big names — Margot Kidder, Brian Keith, James Earl Jones, then you added Russell Means. How was the rest of the project developing at this point?

CJ: Well, we had the script 75-80 percent done. We began filling in the holes, filming other characters. We looked for a new Countess and Catrine knew the girl who played the daughter in *Life Goes On*, so we changed the part a bit, and she gave a dynamite reading. We had some other talent from TV shows.

RB: As in *Mean Streets* and *Martian Memorandum*, Tex Murphy is based in San Francisco.

CJ: Of course. San Francisco was built to be a home for private eye mysteries. *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade. The city has atmosphere, flavor, ambience. I'm from Utah, but I love San Francisco. It's the greatest city on earth, really. I love it because of the movies, in a way. Hitchcock films, *Rear Window*, *Vertigo*, *The Birds* even starts there. That's where I first acquired my love for San Francisco.

In my mind, I always go back to that scene in *Vertigo* where Kim Novak is standing just under the Golden Gate Bridge and she dives into the water. Hitchcock's camera at that point makes everything larger than life — the bridge looks 2,000 feet tall, the girders are mile wide, and there she is. To me, that's what movies are all about. That magic that he creates of that moment ... with that music and that mood and that city back there, everything.

RB: Speaking of creating atmosphere ... why don't you talk about the *look* of the game a little bit.

CJ: Well, we wanted two effects. It's a post-nuclear situation, with a new city area that's very sterile and just like any other city in the world. Then there's Old San Francisco, Coit Tower and all, which was pretty much



blown away in our back story. Because of the radiation, nobody goes there but outcast mutants and of course Tex. His office is just around the corner from Coit Tower, in fact. You look out his window onto the street, all you see is desolation, which goes on for miles. Tex lives there because he's more at home with the down and out.

RB: Like any good private investigator.

CJ: Right. Doug Vandegrift was the original art director, but he left the company a few months ago. The model was old-style, run-down, down and out, seedy, make it feel like it's the Depression. In Tex's neighborhood it could be 1938. Dirty, dark alleys and streets, wrecked buildings, that post-apocalypse feel. Then in the new city, Tex moves through beautiful condominiums and high-tech office complexes and facilities.

RB: So once you got all the art and video performances together, how was post-production?

CJ: Nastier than I thought it would be. The scope of the game, the huge amount of data, has kept us insanely busy trying to put the pieces together. The superstructure is done, but it's like building a house ... it's the detail work that will kill you. Layer upon layer, sound here, transition here, pacing. It's a *huge* job.

We've spent a lot of time widening the world of the game. You can have a lot of fun in *Under a Killing Moon* doing things that have no real value in terms of the central, linear plot line. Yet these things are still rele

vant to the story in a horizontal sense because they build or reveal character — particularly Tex's character. We want you to really *know* Tex, so we built a lot of back story elements into the game. Things you find in his office, his desk drawers, they all reveal his personal history.



And wherever else you go in the game, you'll find highly detailed objects to examine — pictures and posters on walls, graffiti, whatever — things that may have little or nothing to do with the mystery. Yet we think they're *extremely* important because they enhance that sense of being in a vast alternate world. We had a lot of fun with these elements, but they've increased the scope of the game so much that we're killing ourselves trying to pull it all together.

RB: As I move through *Under a Killing Moon*, again, I can't help but think of *Bladerunner*. The blend of a seedy, Chandleresque, 1940's-style private eye genre with futuristic science fiction. You do the same thing, giving Tex a Sam Spade-like first-person narrative voice.

CJ: Like I said, *Bladerunner* was a real influence, I think, for both Aaron and myself. That first-person perspective is the only way to really suck a viewer/player into the virtual world. Everything comes to you through Tex's eyes, you hear what he thinks about everything. It's a total enveloping process. You see objects and hear Tex's thoughts as if they were your own while you move through this 3-D world.

RB: That first-person narrative voice is such a fundamental part of the private eye genre, isn't it? And yet I read that Ridley Scott actually didn't want Harrison Ford's voiceover in *Bladerunner*. In the recent "director's cut" version of the movie, it isn't there! Things just happen, with no explanation.

CJ: All style, no substance.

RB: Yeah, I don't think Ridley Scott really understood his genre. I mean, the voiceover is what I expect from a detective film — the guy describing what he's seeing, the beating he just took, whatever.



CJ: Exactly. People talk about Ridley Scott's director's cut of *Bladerunner*. But if that was your first time through that movie, you wouldn't have the faintest idea what was going on. Without those voiceovers, you are dead. I can see those studio executives going, "What did I just watch?" Those voiceovers were critical! I mean, I've seen *Bladerunner* ten times, so I know what's going on. But without the voiceover, a new viewer would be totally lost. Without them, it misses the point of the genre it supposedly borrows from.

RB: Because that genre is so character-driven. We love to see through the eyes of the cynical private investigator. Bogart as Sam Spade, Robert Mitchum as Philip Marlowe. We want their thoughts, their impressions of the world.

CJ: That first-person feel was critical for our game. We really wanted to pay homage to those classic detective films of the 1930s and 40s. Of course, we play off the genre for laughs at times. But they're very *respectful* laughs. We're great lovers of the genre.

Steve Witzel: As you start, you don't know what the game's about. You're a down-and-out, broke detective, and you don't know what the story is. And as Chris describes it, it's like a Hitchcock tale, like *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Slowly, you get little pieces of information, but they don't make sense. Eventually, you're just surrounded by this wall of information —

CJ: To me, it's important to keep a player off-balance but still wanting to go on. I want to knock you off the trail, make you say, "Where did that come from?" But I don't want to lose you. The key, again, is the pacing. That's why we divided the story into six days. There are different cases for each day, but eventually they all come together. Everything is related. There are no *7th Guest* type things — you know, "Here's a puzzle to solve so you can move on to the next room ... move these little marbles around here" or whatever. None of that. In *Under a Killing Moon*, everything is interrelated



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Interviews with Chris Jones and Aaron Conners, Creators of Under a Killing Moon

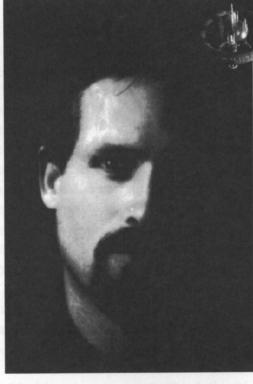
Interview with Aaron Conners

When you play *Under a Killing Moon*, one of the first things you notice is the wit of the lines. The script, clearly written by a literate individual, is full of allusions to other genres, to sources both cinematic and literary. As it turns out, Aaron Conners, *Under a Killing Moon*'s scriptwriter, spent his early years studying Shakespeare and Chaucer as an English lit major at the University of Utah.

"I was terrified of computers all the way through high school and college," he admits. "I preferred to write on a type-

writer. I never even *used* a computer in college. I had originally planned to get the English degree, then get a Masters in Education and become a teacher."

But not all of his reading passions were strictly mainline English lit. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was one of his favorite literary experiences, and it remains an annual experience for him — "I lose one long weekend every year to *Lord of the Rings*, reading the whole thing straight through from beginning to end," he admits. Then a fortuitous series of events led him to a technical writing position at Access. After a short period of time hacking out manuals and on-line hints, Conners found himself being offered the opportunity to craft lines for people like James Earl Jones, Brian Keith, and Margot Kidder.



Part 3





"It's a dream job for anyone who writes," he says, shaking his head. "I mean, James Earl Jones ... he's *Darth Vader*, man! And there he is, reading lines I wrote."

Rick Barba: What kind of audience did you have in mind when writing *Under a Killing Moon*?

Aaron Conners: I think I was picturing a Star Trek kind of crowd, people who are interested in the lighter science fiction, the more mainstream science fiction. Typically, those are the people who are into some of the more modern computer adventure releases. It seems to me like we'll have a market waiting for this type of stuff, people who say, "I like science fiction, but I'm not hard-core. I like it easy to absorb." I think this Tex Murphy material is in the same vein.

RB: It's such a beautiful mixture of genres. Updating old genres is a great technique, it breathes new life into them. I talked to Chris Jones about *Bladerunner*, for example.

AC: One thing we really enjoyed in *Bladerunner* was the fact that it was new to us, but old to them. We borrowed that notion — Tex is living in the future, but it's not a sleek, glossy, high-tech future, but rather a future where things are just as grimy as they are now. When Tex gets a piece of futuristic equipment to work with, it's probably broken.

RB: How do you see Tex Murphy as a character?

AC: Well, I love the inherent humor in the situation, and I see Tex in that context. I mean, he's a man out of time, which works well both ways, because we can put him in an environment that none of us are familiar



with ... and he doesn't seem to be familiar with it, either. So we can relate to him.

At the same time, he's got the sensibilities of the 1940's, which is nostalgic to us. I think it ties in really well together, but it's inherently humorous because he's constantly out of place, no matter where he goes. He's a CD-PI, and he doesn't really have any peers — when he goes to the people who hire him, they're generally higher class and think he's scum. And yet he thinks that everyone at his level or lower are scum.

Tex's basic attitude reminds me of the George Carlin line: "When you're out driving, anyone driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone driving faster than you is a maniac." That's kind of the way Tex is. He doesn't seem to fit in with anyone. A good example is the Countess conversation. Tex is hired by this rich heiress to find an artifact that's been stolen from her house. He can't resist making a joke at every opportunity, even though it may cost him the job. Tex has an inherent dislike of people who are born privileged. So he just has to poke them all the time. That's how I see Tex's character, fueled by this natural irreverence.

RB: How did you first get involved in the *Under a Killing Moon* project? You weren't involved in the previous Tex Murphy projects.

AC: No, I wasn't involved with *Martian Memorandum* at all. The first work I did for this group of people was when Chris Jones asked me to do the hint system for another Access product, *Amazon*. He wanted it to be entertaining in its own right. So we designed a system with a lot of humor in the hints. Chris liked the work I did, and asked me to put together a story idea for the next Tex Murphy game. He also knew a had written murder mysteries.

RB: Tell us about these murder mysteries.

AC: Well, they're not a written story so much as they are a group of roles



to be performed. I'll invite ten or twelve people, write character cards for each, then they act out the roles, questioning each other until they decide who the murderer is. Chris liked that concept, and said a Tex Murphy mystery isn't so much a story as it is a multi-faceted tree structure, so just writing a linear story isn't going to be enough.

Anyway, I played *Mean Streets* and *Martian Memorandum* to get a feel for it. Then I wrote up a script that I called *Under a Killing Moon*. At the time, we weren't quite familiar with the parameters of CD-ROM technology. We figured it meant "endless space." (laughs) We could do *anything* we wanted. Well, three months into the project, we found out we were going to fill up at least two CDs. Then soon we went to three, and even now we're kind of tiptoeing along the line between three and four. Which is really frightening. We came from *Amazon*, which had nine floppy disks. We couldn't believe one CD could be filled up so quickly.

So I'd written a story based on initial parameters set by Chris, which was basically 100 rooms with thirty to forty characters. I wrote up this massive story with monumental plot shifts, huge subplots. In fact, when I initially presented the story, it took about an hour and a half just to run through it!

We started working on it, and after two or three locations were complete we looked at the hard disk space we were filling and Chris said, "OK, I want the number of rooms and characters cut in half." I hacked away with my red pen, and even cut out the hunk of the story that is the reference for the title. Originally, Tex would go to the moon, which had been turned into a penal colony. The warden was essentially mining things out of the moon and creating weapons to give to the Moonchild spaceship. So Tex could discover all this experimentation going on under the surface of the moon. Hence, the title.

But we'd had the title so long, we couldn't really let go, so it evolved to the point where *Under a Killing Moon* referred to the Moonchild instead. Fortunately, it still worked. But that whole moon sequence was just lopped off.



RB: What was your original document like? Was it a treatment, or was it more script-like, with branching conversations?

AC: It was a fairly detailed outline, dividing the game into phases. The program was constructed as a series of bottlenecks, which are the ends of each of the six days. Players must pass through that bottleneck to move to the next phase of the game. But within each phase is a practically endless number of ways that you can get from beginning to end.

RB: Before we move on, let's talk a little bit about your background. You were an English literature major in college, right?

AC: At the University of Utah.

RB: How did you originally come to Access?

AC: It's funny ... I was terrified of computers all the way through high school and college. I preferred to write on a typewriter. I never used a computer in college. I had originally planned to get the English degree, then get a Masters in Education and become a teacher. I ended up married and in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in a job I hated, which dealt with student financing.

I came back here and looked for work. Well, a friend of mine is one of the *Links* programmers here at Access, and he gave me a ring for no apparent reason. We had lunch and he told me Access needed a writer. The first project I did for them was the help file and manual for the *Microsoft Golf* project, where we basically converted *Links* to Windows compatibility. Then I rewrote the *Links 386* manual, then on to *Amazon* and eventually this project. So I was essentially hired as a technical writer.

RB: What exactly is your role as the writer for *Under a Killing Moon*?



AC: Well, it's more or less a co-designer role with Chris Jones. I don't know how it works for other companies, but for us it meant we told everyone how we wanted to do it, and if it wasn't how we wanted it, then they re-did it.

Chris is wonderful to work with. One thing that makes our working relationship so easy is that we have identical taste. We had a murder mystery party about a year ago, and I invited a bunch of people including Chris and his wife over to the apartment. She walked in and said, "This looks just like Chris's den." The color scheme, the Bogart posters on the wall, the music — Beatles, Nat King Cole — it was bizarre, she couldn't believe it.

Of course, it's really helped the design process, because generally, if I think something's funny, so does he. Chris has always aspired to the sophisticated level of humor you find in *Casablanca* or *The Maltese Falcon*, the kind of humor that doesn't rely on skin or vulgarity. He wanted the kind of high satire, a timeless humor that can appeal to everyone. *Casablanca* is one of the wittiest scripts ever written, and it's as funny as anything you'll find on a contemporary sitcom. We wanted humor that didn't rely on current events or vulgar sources, something that would be funny twenty years from now.

So a lot of our humor is satire and parody of classic movies or even passages from books and plays. It's the kind of game that's going to reward the literate user, I think. Not that we wanted to be "holier than thou," but we wanted it to be rewarding to the person who doesn't typically play an arcade style game, but instead goes for the more intellectual endeavor.

RB: The script certainly rewards the literate user. Of course, the technology is stunning too, but that will pass soon enough. The story is what lasts, if anything does.

AC: When we sat down to design the game, we literally started from scratch. There's nothing left over from *Martian Memorandum*. We made



a list of priorities that we wanted on the screen, and at the top of the list was "Story." That came before any of the technological specifications.

Chris wrote down his bywords: "Timing, Pacing, Tension." We established the type of content we wanted — the best possible mix of humor and suspense. Now, I'm a huge fan of the original *Star Trek* and *Star Trek*: *The Next Generation*, and my favorite movies are *Casablanca*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and so on. So to integrate the two genres seemed a natural for me. We talked about story, the characters, the overall tone. Then we went to the technology.

We looked around, saw that the hottest games out were *Wolfenstein* and *The 7th Guest*, so we said, "First of all, it needs a first-person perspective." Those two games had two different approaches that weren't meeting in a way we thought our game could. *The 7th Guest* was beautiful, but sterile. Very nice veneer, but not a lot of depth to it. Whereas *Wolfenstein* had a lot of depth, it seemed to go on and on and on, but it didn't really look that good, it was choppy. So we thought there's got to be a way to integrate the two things, because we wanted to become the *Links* of adventure games.

RB: You didn't want to make just another pretty game, or a so-called "interactive movie" with a bunch of video sequences connected by some tepid gameplay.

AC: Right. I mean, there's more game in *Under a Killing Moon* than in any game I've ever seen. We didn't want another *Quantum Gate*. We have a group of testers who've done nothing but play this game for several months, and the fastest any of them has *ever* been able to get through is eight hours. That's with knowing everything, taking all the shortcuts.

I wanted people to have the same experience with this game as I had reading the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. I didn't want that story to end. With most computer games, all the player wants to do is get to the end, finish it, "solve" it, win. We wanted to create the type of experience that you savor all the way through, like a good movie. We wanted *Under a*



Killing Moon to take a long time without being in any way frustrating. We really tried to make it enjoyable every step of the way.

Speaking of *Lord of the Rings* ... one of the things Tolkien did so well was to take folklore and legend from disparate sources and combine them into one alternate universe. Even the little things, like people's names, are based in actual mythology. Primarily of course he uses Nordic mythology, but he also taps into the faerie myths and other sources. Now, in a lot of interactive games, the characters are very similar, undifferentiated. I wanted characters that were individual people. I can't bear to play anything in the *King's Quest* series or anything like it. The puzzles are mostly trial and error, and I find that very frustrating.

In fact, that was one area where Chris and I had to reach a compromise. At one early point, Tex comes out of his hotel to find out that his speeder has been repossessed and chained up. My idea was that he should have to go to the police station and cut a deal with them in order to get it free. Chris thought Tex should go find some acid somewhere in a barrel, then pour it on the chain to melt it.

Well, that exemplified our different approaches. Mine is, I guess, "hyperrealistic." If I come out and find my car chained up, my first instinct isn't to go look for some acid. It's to go find someone who's capable of helping me out of the situation. So we had to kind of argue that one out. And we ended up going more toward the logical puzzles.

RB: OK, you got the story and script together, and then at some point you decided to use professional acting talent.

AC: Doug Vandegrift was the art director through most of the project, and he also happens to be very active in community theater as well as a gifted actor and director. He's also very good with makeup; in previous Tex Murphy games, when we had no live video and almost no voice, he would play three or four different characters and do just fine.

But for this project we needed real actors, and we also needed some special effects. Jon Clark happens to be very good at prosthetics.



Doug played the Beek character, the guy with elephant trunk and tusks. The prosthetic had hydraulic lines running down the nose, so that when Doug talked, Jon would manipulate the nose up and down, side to side. (laughs) It was hilarious.

We were able to make different-looking characters out of the same people in the early Tex Murphy games. But once we're capturing the voice, we have to cast unique individuals. Doug plays Beek, and he plays Rook the pawn shop owner. But for the rest, we had to get a unique actor for each character. I play Ardo, the hotel desk clerk, and a couple other characters were filled in by some Access people with acting experience. But the rest of the characters are all professional talent.

When we found out Margot Kidder was coming in, we were ecstatic, but we had no particular role written for her. I had less than a day to sit down with the script and beef up one of the minor characters and add two new puzzles to the story, so she would have more of an influence in the plot. I finished about two hours before she arrived. Well, she came in and did such a fabulous job that we just couldn't go back after that. She'd do the line perfect the first time. We'd ask for insurance takes, so she'd do two or three takes on each line, and each time she'd do it slightly different, or change a word to fit her style more, or whatever. It was just amazing to watch her work. I mean, we really had a great time.

So we went out looking for more professional talent, because we were hooked. Of course, we had certain budget limitations, but because we have everything storyboarded, and know exactly which lines will be spoken at which camera, it means only four or five hours of filming work per character.

Well, Margot enjoyed it so much, and she told us Russell Means would love to do this. They were going out at the time, apparently. He'd just finished *Last of the Mohicans* and was filming the new Oliver Stone movie, *Natural Born Killers*. So Margot got him to come in, and again, I didn't have part for him. (laughs) So I wrote a bunch of stuff on short notice. In fact, none of the three major characters were major characters in the original script. Well, I guess Russell had been a programmer in the early 1970's, and he was really interested in the technology. We did him, and Chris decided to do the fight scene first.



RB: Which is hilarious, since the pipe Russell's character uses on Tex Murphy is supposed to be made of lead. If you've seen the sequence ... well, the blows he delivers, nobody could live through that beating.

AC: (laughs) Hey, the actual pipe he used is foam rubber, and he still almost took Chris's head off! Yeah, there were no holds barred, man, Russell just walked out and *clubbed* him. The actual sounds of the fight are worse than the ones we dubbed in! They did the fight scene about five or six times, and then he did the lines.

Once we had Russell and Margot, we just had to go for a *trio* of big stars. Our dream list for the Colonel had Robert Mitchum at the top, but he wasn't too interested. But the next guy we considered, Brian Keith, was available.

RB: And finally, you got James Earl Jones.

AC: Yeah. I'd written a number of death scenes for Tex ... about sixteen of them, I think. They were supposed to be spoken by Tex, but then John Clark and the others pulled me in a room and said, "Listen to this idea. There's a big white light, and Tex is standing in front of it in silhouette. Then you hear a voice telling Tex he's dead, but then it gives him another chance to go back." We thought this "God voice" could give Tex specific advice, tell him what not to do, etcetera, with some of the deaths. That way we could run the same video with different audio.

Anyway, we were wondering who to get to play God, and I said, "James Earl Jones." Well, everyone cracked up. "That's a good one, ha, ha, ha!" But I said, "Why not?" When we tried his agent, I don't think any of us really thought we could afford him even if he was available. In fact, the guy charges something like fifty thousand dollars, flat rate, for any kind of speaking role twenty minutes or less. Well, as you know, it turns out his son is a big fan of CD-ROM games.



RB: Nobody can read a line like that guy.

AC: He's the best. For me, as a writer, the ultimate thrill has been watching people like Brian Keith, who I saw in *Parent Trap* when I was a kid, perform my lines. And Margot Kidder, who has a direct hand in the loss of my virginity. It was immediately after seeing *Superman II*, you know, after their little love scene. My girlfriend and I were like, *wow*. (laughs) Then I saw Russell Means in *Last of the Mohicans*. And then James Earl Jones ... I mean, he's Darth Vader, man! I always wanted to just *meet* him. And there he is, reading lines I wrote. He's the most gracious man. It was just a trip for me. It's a dream job for anyone who writes.

Anyway, we decided that getting top talent was very important. We felt that if we wanted to make the leap from a nice little computer game to something that would actually grab the interest of the industry — not just the computer industry, but the *entertainment* industry — then we'd have to go this way. We wanted it clear that it isn't just movies and TV now, it's computers and interactive as well. We're all competing for the same audience and the same dollars and the same levels of acting and storytelling. I really feel like we're at the forefront of the future of entertainment.



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